

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A LAD OF IRON NERVE

OR,

LITTLE JOE'S BIG BONANZA

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

MADGE MASON AND OTHERS.

"It's no use of you following me about, Noah Wood. I won't have anything to say to you," said pretty Madge Mason, to a surly-looking youth one year her senior.

"Why won't you?" asked Noah, in a disagreeable tone.

"Because I don't like you."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No, I don't," said the girl with some spirit.

"Ain't I good enough for you any more?"

"I don't want to talk about the matter."

"Well, I want to talk about it."

"Then talk to yourself. I'm going home."

"I'll go with you."

"I don't care for your company."

"Look here, Madge Mason, you haven't always treated me this way. Once we were pretty good friends."

"That was before I knew you as well as I do now."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said."

"You have known me for five years, ever since you came to this town with your uncle to live, and you treated me well enough till you got acquainted with that sawed-off lobster, Joe Hooker, and since then you've been trying to shake me for him."

"You're talking nonsense," said Madge, with a rosy flush.

"No, I ain't talking nonsense. I've got eyes and can see, I guess."

The girl made no reply.

"What's he, anyway? Nothing but a common printer," went on Noah with a sneer.

"A common printer!" flashed Madge, indignantly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk that way. I suppose you think a printer isn't as good as a carpenter, or any other skilled workman."

"Oh, he's only a bum printer. He ain't a skilled workman. He's just learning the business in the Record office, and a fellow who sets type there says he'll never amount to anything."

"You're jealous of him, Noah Wood, that's what you are, and I don't believe anybody ever told you that Joe wouldn't amount to anything. If he did he didn't tell you the truth. Joe Hooker is a smart boy. If you were half as smart you'd be lucky."

"Is that so?" snorted Noah. "If I didn't know more'n him I'd go and jump into the river."

"Then you'd better go and jump into the river, for you don't know a quarter as much as he does. I don't wonder,

either, because you're so lazy and shiftless that you won't take the trouble to learn anything. Why don't you help your father, and learn his business? My uncle says he's a first-class carpenter."

"Ho! What do you think I am? I'm going to learn to be a lawyer."

"A pretty lawyer you'd make. You haven't got education enough."

"Is that so? I've been at school as long as you, and you think you know a whole lot. Mr. Wrangle is going to take me into his office next week. He's one of the best lawyers in town. I won't have to take my coat off there, and roll up my sleeves to the elbow like Joe Hooker and other common laborers. A lawyer is a gentleman, and his clerks are gentlemen. They amount to something, and that's more than printers and carpenters ever do."

"I've said all I care to and more than I intended to you. After this I want you to attend to your own affairs and not annoy me with your undesirable attentions. I don't like you, and when I don't like a person I don't want to be bothered by them."

With those words Madge Mason turned and walked away, leaving Noah Wood looking after her as mad as a hornet.

Madge was one of the prettiest and most spirited girls in the town of Corinth.

She lived on the outskirts of the town, in a pretentious old mansion, standing on the banks of a tributary of the Missouri River, with her uncle, David Peck, a well-to-do retired steamboat captain.

Everybody, so to speak, knew Captain Peck.

He was short, stout, and somewhat baldheaded.

His face and hands, from long exposure to the weather, were tanned the color of mahogany, and he sported a thick crop of aggressive-looking whiskers which made him appear very fierce, indeed, particularly when he was out of temper, which seemed to be his chronic condition.

He was a widower, and as Madge was the only relative he had, he was very fond of her.

As she was beginning to bloom into young womanhood, the possibility of her falling in love with some young fellow, and leaving him alone in his old age, bothered him not a little; in fact it was the real cause of his temper being so sour.

To protect himself against such a contingency he took the very worst course, and that was to deny her the privilege of receiving male visitors, and to provide her with a maid who was instructed to report to him if she carried on any correspondence with boys or young men.

The maid, whose name was Kittie Drew, proved recreant to the trust which the captain reposed in her, for she soon grew to like her mistress a lot better than the master of the

house, whom she regarded as an old ogre, whose whiskers she declared to be positively terrifying when he was angry.

Whenever Madge went out, Kittie had orders to accompany her.

Mistress and maid got on so well together that Madge was well pleased to have Kittie with her.

Frequently Kittie took advantage of these outings to visit her mother at the other side of town, with Madge's permission, but the two girls always arranged a rendezvous where they met and returned to the "castle" together, so that Captain Peck, up to the present time, had no suspicion that his orders were not fully carried out.

Before her distasteful meeting with Noah Wood, Madge had called at the office of the tri-weekly Record and had a brief talk with Joe Hooker, who, owing to his somewhat abbreviated stature was facetiously called "Little Joe" by his associates.

Joe didn't care for that, for he recollected that many of the greatest men of the world's history—Julius Cæsar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Ulysses Grant, for instance—were men of small size.

Madge liked Joe, and Joe was sweet on Madge.

We may remark here that Joe's particular friend, Tom Bland, who had acquired the habit of declaring that everything that didn't jibe with his views would "end in a blow up," was sweet on Kittie Drew, Madge's sprightly and good looking maid.

Madge sympathized with Joe because he was an orphan and had to hustle for his living; while Joe sympathized with Madge because she was under the thumb of a crusty old guardian, quite overlooking the fact that the captain didn't mean to be hard on his niece, but was merely carrying out his ideas of what he thought was best for her own good.

After leaving the Record office, and while on her way to the rendezvous where she expected to rejoin Kittie, who had gone to see her mother, she encountered Noah Wood.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE JOB ROOM OF THE "RECORD."

While Madge was trying to rid herself of Noah's company, Little Joe was busily employed in the job room of the Record Publishing Co.

He was a fast type-setter, and stood well in the good graces of the foreman of his room, who having taken a fancy to him was pushing him ahead as fast as possible, giving him every opportunity to make good as an all-around compositor.

On the afternoon in question he was at the stone making corrections in a railroad time-table, with a small figure case in front of him.

Tom Bland was a job press feeder, and had just run off 1,000 business cards on his press and was taking the form over to the trough to wash it.

Another feeder, who was waiting for the pressman to finish making ready a job on his machine, taking advantage of the fact the foreman had gone into the next room to speak to a Morgenthaler operator, stuck out his foot.

Dire results followed.

Tom stumbled over the obstruction in his path, threw out both hands to save himself, and as the job form was in one of them, it collided with an eight-page book form standing ready to be lifted on a pony cylinder, and there was a crash—the big form going to pi and Tom rolling over on the floor, but managing to save his own form from participating in the general wreckage.

The guilty youth, though startled by the damage he had unintentionally caused, had the wit to quickly draw back his foot and assume a very innocent look.

The smash-up attracted general attention, and drew forth many grins from the typos and feeders, who, in such cases, seem to forget the sympathy due an unfortunate comrade.

The foreman appeared with the quickness of a person on roller skates, and the first thing he saw was Tom picking himself up.

"Hello, what's happened?" he demanded.

"That eight-page form I was getting the 'pony' ready for has gone to pi," said the pressman.

As job room foremen are never known to swear or lose their temper under the most trying conditions, the ejaculation the boss of the room let out couldn't have been an oath, though it was hot enough to melt all the type in the office according to Little Joe, who heard it easily enough.

"Did you do that, Bland?" roared the foreman, his eyes snapping like live coals.

"Well I couldn't help it if I did," replied Tom, doggedly, well aware of the enormity of the offence.

"Couldn't help it!"

"No. I was carrying this form to the lie pot when that funny guy," pointing at the joker, "put out one of his flat-boats and tripped me up."

"Don't you know any better than to butt into a live form, confound you?" said the foreman.

"Yes, but how was I to help it? I saved this form at any rate."

"That form be blessed! What does it amount to alongside the other job that had to be run off this afternoon? It's likely to be run off now, isn't it? When I report the matter in the office there'll be something doing I fancy."

"What are you jawing me for when I tell you that Duncan is to blame?" growled Tom.

"Because this wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been so awkward," said the foreman.

Then he turned to haul Duncan over the coals, but that lad had sneaked behind the double cylinder on which the paper was printed.

Not seeing the boy the foreman shouted for him.

Duncan deemed it prudent to make his appearance.

"Why did you trip Bland up and make him pi that form?" asked the foreman.

"Me, sir? Bland is off his base. I didn't trip him up. He fell over his own feet and mistook them for mine," said Duncan.

"You and Bland will stay here to-night and not go home till you set up every type of that pi. And to-morrow night you will distribute it," said the foreman.

"I guess not," muttered Tom, who heard the order plain enough. "I'm not to blame and I don't intend to be made a goat of. If Buckley wants to fire me he can do it, but I won't let him sit on my neck. I can get a job at the Argus office."

The foreman then got the revised proof the destroyed form, and set four hands at work setting it up again.

The foreman reported the disaster to one of the proprietors, and said that the delivery of the job would be delayed twenty-four hours unless the compositors worked overtime.

As that would cost the office more money, and there was no great rush in the job room, he was told to get the work out in the regular hours.

Tom washed his form and shoved it into the job rack.

He made up his mind to have it out with Duncan just the same.

He knew he could whip the other feeder if he tried hard enough, and he intended to put it over for keeps.

Duncan had played him a low down trick, and he wasn't going to stand for it.

Besides, he and Joe had arranged to call on Madge and Kittie that night at the "castle," as they called the captain's fortified residence, and Joe had made the date when she called to see him that afternoon.

There was only one way by which they could get into the grounds without having a strenuous discussion with the bull dog, and that was by taking a boat and rowing up to the northwest corner of the river wall, throwing a rope over one of the spikes, climbing up and then connecting with a rope ladder which the girls would let down from an unfurnished corner room which was known as the haunted chamber, though no ghost had been seen on the premises during the five years the captain had occupied the house.

The rope ladder had been supplied by the boys, and they had used this private route on several occasions with success.

Tom knew Joe wouldn't keep the date without him, and if he had to stay and sort half that type out why the girls would be disappointed, and he could almost guess what Kittie would say about him.

However, there seemed to be no help for it, and Tom started feeding his press in a grouchy frame of mind.

The whistle blew at five and all hands knocked off work.

Tom went up to the foreman.

"I suppose I can eat before I tackle that job," he said.

"Get back at half-past and sail in. The quicker you work the sooner you'll be through," said the foreman, shortly.

"I ain't a comp, so you can't expect me to stick it up so fast."

"It's only pi. You slap it up any way, leaving out the spaces and quads, but see that you keep the nicks up, so it can be distributed without trouble."

"All right. It's a shame though, for I wasn't to blame."

"You were half to blame. At any rate you've got to stand

for your share. If you'd looked where you were falling the thing wouldn't have happened."

"I didn't have no time to look. I came near busting my brains out anyway," said Tom, and then he walked over to the trough.

Duncan was putting on his coat.

Tom saw him, but he intended to wait until Duncan came back to set the pi.

Joe came over to his friend.

"Say, Tom, I'm going to help you out. We'll eat at the beanery next door, and then I'll come back with you. It's twelve-point, and about a third of it is quads and spaces. We'll get your share up in time for us to keep our date, though we'll be a little late; but the girls will be on the lookout for us."

"Thanks, Joe; you're a good fellow. I've got to put a few wallops over Duncan before we start in, or I wouldn't feel I had done justice to myself."

"Let him slide. He'll have to stay at the job three times as long as you. That will punish him, for he'll have only the watchman for company," said Joe.

It took some persuasion on Joe's part to make Tom forego his vengeance, but he finally consented to do so.

The boys hurried through their meal and hustled back to the office.

It was summer time so they had a couple of hours of daylight before them before it would be necessary to light up the stone on which lay the two big bunches of pi.

"Gee!" exclaimed Joe, "that looks like forty pages instead of eight."

At the moment Duncan came in the door and stopped.

"Come on in and get busy, Duncan," said Joe.

"I don't want to get into a scrap with Bland," said the other.

"There won't be any scrap," said Joe. "Tom has called the blow up off."

"All right," said the feeder, shedding his jacket and approaching the stone. "Where do I get a stick?"

"I'll get you one," said Joe, and he did.

"Aw, this ain't fair," said Duncan. "You're helping Bland and I ain't got no one to help me. It'll take me all night to get away with that mountain."

"I hope it will, you blamed lobster," growled Tom. "You ought to set up the whole business, for the whole thing was your fault. And you ought to be made to pay for the resetting of the job, and the time it will take to make it up and lock it up again."

"I didn't mean nothing. I didn't expect you'd fall over my foot."

"Of course, you didn't. What did you shove it in front of me for then? If I hadn't promised Joe I'd let it go I'd knock seven kinds of tar out of you," and Tom looked as if he meant it.

Duncan shut up and went to work in a listless way, which promised to keep him at work all night.

Joe and Tom, on the contrary, worked like a house afire, and Tom's mountain of pi melted rapidly down.

Just as the clock struck eight, Joe dumped the last stickful on the second galley.

He gathered up the quads and distributed them in the cases where they belonged and then brushed the spaces off into a paper.

"How are you coming on, you slow poke?" grinned Tom, willing to forgive Duncan now that the penalty had been wiped out on his side.

"How do you s'pose with only me a-doing it?" said the feeder. "I ain't quarter through."

"I wish you luck. I suppose we'll find you here when we come to work in the morning?" chuckled Tom.

"Do you think I'm going to stay here alone?"

"The watchman will be here."

"Rats. If you chaps are done I'm going to quit, too."

"If that pi ain't all up when the foreman comes in the morning you'll hear from him, and I hope you will, good and proper," said Tom.

"I'll tell him Joe helped you out."

"Tell him. What do I care. If Joe felt like doing it that's his business."

Joe and his friend put on their jackets, walked out and laid their course for a boat-house half a mile below the Peck residence.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVERS MEET.

"It's ten minutes of eight, Miss Madge," said Kittie Drew, looking at the gilt clock which stood on a bracket shelf in the corner of Miss Mason's boudoir. "The boys are due in a few

minutes, and we must put the light in the window of the vacant room to let them know that everything is serene."

"Well, light your own lamp and take it in there! I can't spare mine yet, for I haven't quite finished my toilet," replied Madge.

"What me to go alone into the haunted room?" exclaimed Kittie, with a little shudder. "Oh, dear, no. I wouldn't dare."

"Why, you goose, what are you afraid of?" laughed Madge.

"I'm afraid the spook might catch me."

"You know there isn't any such thing."

"Indeed, I know there is. My granny used to tell me stories about them that made the chills run up and down my back. Why, once upon a time—"

"Never mind, Kittie, I don't want to hear any of your ghost stories. If you're afraid to go alone into that room, we'll both go in together, then, for the boys won't come up unless they see the light. Besides, we've got to put the ladder out. Light your lamp."

Kittie went to her own room across the corridor and presently returned with her lamp.

Although there was both gas and electric light installed clear out to the suburbs of Corinth, neither had been introduced into Captain Peck's residence.

Madge took the rope ladder out of the closet and the girls started for the unoccupied chamber, which was used by the four young people for their clandestine meetings.

Two old trunks filled with clothes, which Madge and her uncle had found in the room when they took possession of the house, were used by the boys to sit on, while the girls brought a couple of small light rockers for themselves.

The light was suffered to remain in the window after the boys climbed in because there was no other place for it.

Kittie had her hand on the knob of the door of the alleged haunted room when the passage was lit up by a flash of lightning and the distant rumble of thunder struck upon their ears.

"Oh, dear, how that startled me!" exclaimed Kittie.

"Aren't you the nervous thing!" laughed Madge.

"I can't help it. I'm always expecting something will happen in that room."

"What could happen in it?"

"This wing of the house has always had the name of being haunted."

"Uncle and I have lived here five years and we've never been disturbed by such foolishness. Go ahead."

They entered the room.

Kittie ran to the window, opened it and looked out on the river.

"All's quiet. I don't hear their boat," she said. "Oh, dear, there's another flash. I verily believe a thunderstorm is coming up. I don't think the boys will come to-night."

"Joe will come," said Madge, putting the light in the window.

After dropping the ladder out the girls waited for their beaus to appear, but owing to the incident at the printing-office that afternoon, Joe and Tom were behind hand.

In the meantime the thunderstorm came on apace.

The boys were in the boat on the river rowing toward the "castle."

"Say, Joe, hadn't we better put back?" said Tom.

"Put back! What for?"

"We're liable to be caught by the storm that's coming up."

"We'll get up to the vacant room before that hits this vicinity."

"And then we'll be stuck there. Suppose the old grampus were to get on to us being there it would be no silly thing to slide down the ladder, and then down the rope into the boat, in the wind and rain. The boat might upset and dump us into the river," said Tom.

"Haven't you got the nerve to face a little thing like that for the sake of your best girl? Well, I have. I'd hang under that window on the ladder all through the storm rather than break my date with Madge."

"I guess you would. You've got an iron nerve, Joe, but some day you may end in a blow-up."

"As the balloon said when they started to inflate it with hot air," chuckled Joe.

"Here we are under the wall of the old grampus's castle," said Tom.

"The light is in the window all right, so the coast is clear," said Joe.

The boat glided in close to the wall and Tom neatly flung the looped end of the rope over one of the spikes.

The slack was taken in and secured through a ring in the bows.

Joe scrambled up first, and was followed by Tom as soon as he started up the ladder.

The lightning lighted up their ascending figures.

Joe tapped on the window three times—the usual signal.

"There's the boys," cried Kittie.

"Open the window and let them in. Aren't they the dear fellows to come in spite of the thunderstorm?" said Madge.

Kittie flung the window, which was made of colored glass, and worked on hinges, wide open.

"Hello, Kittie, here we are," said Little Joe, scrambling into the room.

In a few moments Tom followed, and then the ladder was pulled in to keep it from getting wet by the rain that was coming.

"Run and get the rockers, Kittie," said Madge.

Kittie got them.

"Oh, dear, I don't like a thunderstorm," she said.

"Don't worry," said Tom. "I'll protect you."

At that moment the storm burst upon the landscape with a tremendous rush of wind, accompanied by a vivid flash of lightning and a tremendous peal of thunder.

The girls screamed and grabbed each other.

"See! This storm is a fine background for a haunted chamber, ain't it, Joe?" said Tom.

"Surest thing you know, old chap. Say, Miss Madge, tell us how this room came to get its reputation," said Joe.

"I'd rather tell you some other time," said Madge.

"Some other time! Why this is just the night for it," said Joe.

"Go on and let us hear about it," said Tom.

After much persuasion she reluctantly began:

"This house was built for an old man who came from the West. He was a prospector, whatever that is. It is said that he had lots of money, but one day he disappeared."

"Disappeared!" cried Joe.

"Yes, and nobody ever heard where he went for he never came back."

"What, after building this house?"

"Yes. It was shut up for years waiting for him, and then the county officers took charge of it and it was rented to Miss Madge's uncle."

"Where does the haunted business come in?" asked Joe.

"Shortly after the old man disappeared, and when the place was known to be deserted, lights were seen in this room."

"That's nothing. Might have been tramps who had got in," said Tom.

"No, for ghostly faces were seen at the windows."

"Since the house has been occupied by you and your uncle, Miss Madge, nothing like that has happened."

"Nothing at all," replied the girl.

"Then you can gamble on it that this room is no more haunted than any other room in the house, or any other house in town," said Joe.

A blinding flash of lightning followed his words, succeeded almost instantly by a crash that seemed to stagger the building from roof to cellar.

The rear wall of the room opened up a huge fissure from the ceiling to below the floor.

The shock stunned the four young people.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNCLE AND THE GARDENER INVESTIGATE.

The shock had naturally been felt all through the house. Captain Peck was in the act of getting into bed and he landed on the floor instead.

When he had recovered his wits it struck him that the house had been struck by a bolt, and he wondered if any injury had been done.

Presently somebody knocked on his door.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Me, sir," said the voice of Hiram Sprague, gardener and general factotem.

"Was the house struck that time, Hiram?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir. The river wall is cracked all the way up through the storeroom and sittin'-room on this floor. I reckon the break must go all the way up to the roof."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Captain Peck, opening the door and admitting his man. "My niece and her maid must be badly frightened, for the top floor got it harder than any other part of the house. I must go up there, and you'd better come with me. Wait till I put on some of my things."

In a few minutes the captain was ready to go up stairs and he started, accompanied by Sprague.

By that time Joe, Tom and the girls had recovered from the concussion, but they were all considerably shaken up.

The storm was passing away, taking the wind and rain with it.

It was one of those short, but terrific electrical disturbances, that always seem to reserve a thunderbolt for its finish, then it fades away, like an exhausted athlete at the end of a grueling race.

The girls were almost wrecks, and the boys judged they had better bring their visit to a close.

They were saying good-bys to their trembling sweethearts when steps were heard in the corridor outside and then came a knocking at Madge's door.

"Madge! Madge! It is I, your uncle!" exclaimed a foghorn voice.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the girl, catching Joe, by the arm. "My uncle is outside. You boys must not be discovered here. Quick! throw out the ladder and—"

Bang, bang, bang! went the captain's huge fist on the door again.

The girls looked terribly rattled, for they knew that Captain Peck, receiving no answer, would make an investigation to learn why they were deaf to his summons.

Tom threw the window open, tossed out the ladder, followed himself, but with a certain amount of care, for the descent was risky, and a misstep might prove fatal.

Joe had to wait his turn, and while he stood there, Hiram Sprague called the captain's attention to the light that shone under the door of the unoccupied room.

"My goodness! The room must have caught fire so from the lightning. Come with me," and he started for the door.

Joe and the girls heard him coming.

It was clearly impossible for the boy to make his exit window before Captain Peck got into the room and caught a glimpse of him.

In an instant he made up his mind what he would do.

"Blow out the light," he whispered, and darted for the back of the room.

Madge obeyed, in a flutter of apprehension.

Kittie, with great presence of mind, closed the window. Captain Peck burst into the room.

"Why, why; there's no fire here, and yet I can swear I saw a light," he exclaimed, clearly much mystified.

"There was a light," asserted Sprague.

"It was our lamp, uncle, which went out," said Madge.

The captain jumped nearly a foot at hearing a voice, and his niece's at that, coming out of the darkness.

"You here, Madge!" he ejaculated, in astonishment. "How came you in this room alone?"

"I'm not alone. Kittie is with me."

"Where are you both?"

"Right here," and the girls advanced toward him.

"What brought you here?"

"Did you hear that dreadful crash, uncle? We were frightened to death."

"This corner of the house was hit by a bolt, Sprague says. You both came in to see if any damage had been done, I suppose. Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing, uncle. We didn't—"

"Well, well, give me the lamp and return to your rooms. Got a match, Sprague?"

Madge's heart jumped into her throat, for a light would reveal the presence of Little Joe, and then a serious explanation would be in order.

"Here you are, sir," said the gardener.

"Strike it, my hands are full," said the captain.

Sprague struck the match on his trousers.

The gleam showed the captain with the lamp in one hand and the chimney in the other, as well as the outlines of the two trembling girls.

The wick was ignited, the chimney replaced and the room looked bright again.

Madge gripped Kittie by the hand to nerve herself for the explosion that was certain to follow the discovery of Joe.

Nothing happened, however, for Joe had disappeared.

The girls gasped, for they knew the two trunks were locked, which blocked any possibility of his having crawled into one of them.

He couldn't have slipped out by the door, for the captain and his man stood close to it.

Where then could he have gone?

Surely not through the gaping hole made by the lightning, for that would mean a sixty-foot fall to the yard below.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Captain Peck, as his eyes took in the fissure in the wall. "The lightning certainly cut things up here. Look at that wall, Sprague. A long jagged fissure, with a hole big enough to crawl through on the level of the floor. If that goes all the way down, as you said it did, I guess it will require considerable repairing."

They walked over and inspected the wreck with the light of the lamp.

While they stood there looking it over, the girls were thinking about Joe.

"Where could Joe have hidden himself?" asked Madge.

"I haven't any idea, miss?" whispered back Kittie.

"Do you think he fell out through that hole?"

"Don't mention such a thing. It would be too dreadful."

"Are you girls there yet," snapped the captain, turning around. "Go to your rooms at once and turn in."

Madge and Kittie had no alternative except to obey, but their minds were much disturbed about Little Joe.

A few minutes later they heard the captain and the gardener slam the door of the unoccupied room, and come through the corridor.

Captain Peck knocked at Kittie's door.

"Here's your lamp," he said.

Kittie opened the door and took it.

The mogul of the house and his man then went on down stairs.

Kittie knocked softly on Madge's door, and when her mistress opened it she said:

"Shall we go back to the room and try and see what has happened to Joe?"

"Yes," said Madge. "I couldn't sleep a wink to-night if I didn't know he was safe. Come."

They went to the head of the stairs and listened.

All was silent below, and taking courage they tiptoed to the unoccupied room.

Kittie raised the lamp on high as Madge went ahead.

Standing beside the window, in the act of opening it, was Little Joe.

"Joe!" exclaimed Madge, joyfully, feeling as if it would be a satisfaction to her to throw her arms around his neck and kiss him. "Where were you?"

"Where?" he grinned. "Guess."

"I couldn't."

"I was just practicing a bit of gymnastics."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"All the time your uncle and his man were in this room I was hanging within a yard of them."

"Hanging! You don't mean outside—that you crept through that hole?" gasped Madge, incredulously.

"Where else? You didn't see me in this room."

"Why how did you ever do it?"

"Easily enough though it took some nerve. If I'd lost my grip the dog would have had my bones to play with."

"Well, Tom Bland didn't say more than the truth when he told us you had an iron nerve. It seems incredible that you would have dared to do it."

"Now I must rejoin Tom," said Joe, "but hold the light a moment. I want to see what came out of the wall into my hand."

He held up a paper, which was crumpled and soiled.

Opening it out it appeared to be a kind of diagram of some locality, with sundry descriptive words such as "wall," "tree," "gully," etc.

At the bottom were some consecutive words, several lines of them, probably explanatory of the whole, but Joe did not bother reading them.

"I'll look this over at my leisure and see what it refers to. It hardly belongs to your uncle for it came out of the wall. Rather an odd place for it to be," said Joe, thrusting it into his pocket.

Removing the noose from the spike, and telling Tom to let out some slack, he slid down the doubled rope into the boat and then pulled it clear of the spike.

"The old grampus nabbed you, I suppose, and has been reading you the riot act ever since, eh?" said Tom, as they pushed off from the wall.

"Not on your life. He didn't get me worth a cent," replied Joe.

"Where did you hide—behind one of the trunks?"

"No. I crawled out through the hole made by the thunderbolt, and clung to the wall like a human fly."

Joe then mentioned the paper he found in the wall, and said it looked like a diagram of a piece of property.

"We'll look it over to-morrow, and see what we can make out of it," he said.

In a few minutes they ran alongside of the boathouse landing, made the boat fast, and started for the cottage where they both boarded.

CHAPTER V.

JOE'S IRON NERVE

At five minutes of eight next morning Joe and Tom entered the Record job room, peeled off their jackets, rolled up their sleeves, put on their aprons and were ready to start to work when the whistle sounded.

The foreman walked in, and as he passed the stone where the three boys had worked the evening before he noticed there was still a considerable pile of pi there.

"Is that as far as you got last night, Bland?" he asked.

"No, sir; I finished up my half, with Joe's help," replied Tom.

"Hooker helped you out, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Kind of him, wasn't it? He knew I didn't deserve the deal I got."

"That bunch is Duncan's, then?"

"It must be for it isn't mine."

"What did you do with the spaces and quads?"

"The spaces are in a paper and the quads are in the cases."

At that point Duncan sneaked in and took off his jacket. The foreman's eyes were on him.

"Come here, Duncan," he said, sharply.

"You're in for a blow-up," grinned Tom.

"Why didn't you clean up that pi?" said Buckley.

"I did as much as I could," said the feeder.

"When did you leave?"

"After eight."

"When did you get through, Bland?"

"About eight o'clock."

"He had Joe Hooker to help him and they went through his half in no time. I ain't no type-sticker. I couldn't have finished that all night."

"You'll stay to-night and finish, then. If I find a letter left on the stone when I come in the morning you'll hear from me. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And don't you put any of it in a paper and hide it away. If I catch you doing that trick I'll discharge you. Now get to work."

Joe finished his tabular corrections and was put to work correcting a restaurant daily bill-of-fare, and after that he went on newspaper advts.

He and Tom always took their noon day meal at the little restaurant next door, and they went there when the whistle blew at half-past twelve.

Right after dinner Joe was called on to make up the eight pages that had been piled.

He shoved them on a stone as fast as he tied them up, imposing them as he proceeded.

Then he got one of the chases used on the pony cylinder and laid it around the pages.

He placed metal furniture between the pages, allowing a couple of picas extra for the center fold, each way.

He completed the job with wooden furniture and patent quoins.

After giving it a final planing down, he tightened the quoins, lifted the form off the stone and carried it over to the pony, which was waiting for it.

The afternoon passed quickly enough and in due time Joe and Tom started for their home.

Supper wasn't ready when they arrived so they went up to their room.

Joe produced the diagram he had found in the wall of the "castle," and the boys bent over it.

The first thing Joe did was to read the writing at the bottom.

It ran as follows:

"This is the diagram of the gold cache in Blank County, Mo. Eighteen miles southwest of Plunketville, a village on the Missouri River. One mile beyond woods is a ruin. Pass in through door, follow measurements on diagram and you will land a big bonanza."

"Land a big bonanza," said Joe. "That sounds good. What do you think of it, Tom?"

"I don't know," replied Tom, rather dubiously. "Sounds like a fairy tale."

"This must have belonged to the man who built the Peck

castle. Kittie said he had a lot of money, so he must have found the gold cache."

The supper call sounded at that moment and the boys went down to the little dining-room, after Joe had put the diagram away in his trunk.

Stolen pleasures are always the sweetest, so before the week was out the boys made another date with Madge and Kittie to visit the unoccupied room, the wall of which had not yet been repaired.

Unfortunately for them Noah Wood was down at the river bank for some reason or another when they left the boat-house and began rowing up the river.

He recognized them and wondered where they were bound in the boat.

Curiosity induced him to follow them along the bank, and he saw them steer in for the Peck "castle."

He went as far as the wall would allow him to and then crouching down in the gloom of the evening he saw them make fast to the spike, climb the wall, and finally clamber up the rope ladder to the window and disappear.

"Ho! I wonder what's their game?" he muttered. "Here's a chance to get the Indian sign on that lobster, Little Joe. I'll call around to the front door, ask for Captain Peck, and tell him what's going on in the rear. I wish I could send their boat adrift, but I can't get to it. Never mind. The captain will cook their goose for them."

The young spy rubbed his hands together and chuckled with satisfaction.

Then he started for the front gate.

The gate was always kept locked at night, but there was a bell handle which a visitor could ring at any time.

Noah rang it, and presently Hiram Sprague came out to see who was there.

"Hello, who's there?" asked the gardener.

"Me," said the youth, as if that one word was sufficient to establish his identity.

"Who are you? Let's hear your name," said Sprague.

"Noah Wood."

Noah was not known to either the gardener or the captain.

"What do you want?" asked Sprague.

"I want to see Captain Peck."

"What do you want to see him about? The captain doesn't often receive visitors at night. He goes to bed early, and doesn't want to be disturbed."

"I've got something important to tell him," said Noah.

The gardener thought he had been sent by somebody in the neighborhood with a message to the captain, so he opened the gate and let him in.

Noah followed him up to the front door and into the house.

He was left in the hall to cool his heels until Sprague went to see Captain Peck.

The ex-river skipper was reading a paper in his room.

Sprague was directed to bring Noah up to a small ante-room.

"Well," said the captain, when Noah appeared, "you have a message for me, young man. I will hear it."

Noah lost no time in acquainting Captain Peck with the state of affairs at the back of his house.

"Eh? What's that? You say you saw a couple of thieves enter my premises from the rear?" exclaimed the choleric old gentleman, bristling up.

"I dunno as they are thieves, sir, for somebody threw a rope ladder to them from the window above."

"Confound your impertinence! Do you dare hint that my niece would do such a thing?"

Noah was somewhat cowed by Captain Peck's inflammatory language and actions, but, nevertheless, he stuck to his story.

He added that he guessed the boys had come to visit Miss Mason on the quiet and he had reason to believe that the young lady thought considerably of the smaller of the two lads, whose name he said was Little Joe Hooker, and who worked at the printing business in the Record office.

The captain flew into a rage on hearing that.

He rang for Sprague, and when that worthy appeared he told him to look out of the sitting-room window and see if there was a rowboat tied to one of the wall spikes, and also directed him to look and see if there was a rope ladder hanging from the window of the unoccupied room.

While the gardener was away on his errand Captain Peck paced the room like an angry lion in a circus menagerie.

Sprague returned in a few minutes and reported the presence of a boat, tied as described, but said he could see no rope ladder.

"Stay here till I return," said the captain to Noah. "If I find your news to be correct I shall reward you."

"I'll stay," said Noah, with a satisfied grin.

Directing the gardener to keep him company, the old man started up stairs with fire in his eyes, for the idea that his niece received visitors clandestinely at night in the unoccupied room made him furious.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRLS CAUGHT.

In the excess of his rage the captain forgot that it is necessary to use caution in order to catch people off their guard.

The noise he made in stumping up the stairs easily reached the ears of Joe, Tom and the girls while they were chatting familiarly together.

"My gracious! My uncle!" cried Madge, quite panic struck.

"Out with the light and skip, both of you," cried Joe, springing for the open window and tossing out the ladder.

The girls flew to Madge's room, Tom following them with the rockers, which he dropped in the corridor and returned to the unoccupied room.

Joe was already in the boat, and Tom hurried down and joined him.

It took but a moment to detach the rope from the spike and push off into the river.

In the meantime the captain, puffing like a grampus, reached the landing.

The girls had only time to get one of the rockers in the room.

The other stood in Captain Peck's path, and as there was no light in the corridor he fell over it and went sprawling on the floor.

The rocket he made brought the girls to the door of Madge's room.

"Who's there?" asked Madge, just as if she didn't know.

The captain had barked his shins, and the pain added fuel to his passion.

"Confound it, who put that chair there for me to fall over?" he roared.

"I did, sir," said Kittie. "It belongs in my room. I was going to take it back in a moment. I had no idea anybody was coming up here. I hope you didn't hurt yourself, sir."

"Fire and fury! I've torn all the skin off my shins. How dare you lay such a trap for me? Don't you know any better you—you—"

He was going to use some strong expression, but recollected in time that he was not addressing his old deckhands.

Kittie protested that she was dreadfully sorry, and that she hoped the captain would excuse her.

"Give me your lamp," he cried to Madge.

"My lamp, uncle?"

"Yes; hurry up, do you hear?" he snapped, rubbing his shins tenderly.

Madge delayed as much as possible, and was so long in bringing it that the captain lost what little patience he had left, rushed in and snatched it out of her hand.

Then he limped along the corridor and entered the unoccupied room.

It was dark there, and without the sign of an occupant.

The captain glared around the apartment, looked behind the trunks, in the four corners, and finding nothing in the shape of a pair of youthful intruders he went to the window and opened it, flashing the lamplight on the bricks.

Of course, he saw the rope ladder hanging down, which, under the hurried circumstances, the girls had had no chance to remove.

What the captain said when he saw this proof of Noah Wood's statement almost set the woodwork on fire.

If he was mad before he was boiling now.

He yanked the ladder into the room and detached it from the stout hooks Kittie had driven into the wall to hold the upper end.

Detaching it from the hooks, and being unable to make out anything on the river at the base of the wall, he shut the window, and, with the ladder over his arm, he returned to the entrance of Madge's room where she and Kittie stood in some apprehension as to what results were to follow the captain's unexpected visit to that part of the house.

That he had somehow got wind of the visit of the boys seemed clear.

When they saw Captain Peck approaching with the ladder on his arm their hearts began beating like a trip-hammer, for they knew they were in for it.

"Oh, Kittie, he's got the ladder," whispered Madge.

"It can't be helped. Keep up your courage. We've got to face it out. I'll stand by you," returned Kittie.

"So," exclaimed the captain, "you've been entertaining company on the sly, have you, miss," and he looked daggers at Madge.

"Entertaining company on the sly! Why, uncle——"

"Don't you dare try to deny it!" roared the old man, his whiskers bristling out like the quills of an angry porcupine.

"Look at this," holding up the ladder.

"I'm looking, uncle."

"What do you call it, miss?"

"A rope ladder."

"Exactly. That's just what it is. How came it to be hanging outside the window of the vacant room? Answer me that, miss."

"Why——"

"Jibbooms and marlingspikes! Why don't you answer?"

"How can she, captain, when you won't give her a chance?" put in Kittie.

"Shut up; don't you put your oar in!" cried Captain Peck, glaring at the maid, whom he evidently believed to be guilty of connivance in the affair.

Kittie jumped as if she'd seen a mouse.

"You don't have to shout at me. I can hear you," she replied, indignantly.

"You needn't answer, miss," said the captain to Madge, "for I know all about the matter. Thought your old fool of an uncle and guardian was asleep, eh? Fire and fury! What wind will blow next I wonder?"

"Why, uncle, how agitated you are," said Madge.

"Agitated! Who says I am? Sheet anchors and chain-plates, I'm as cool as an iceberg! Do you hear?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Yes, uncle," sarcastically. "Think you can draw the wool over my eyes, eh? But I've caught you—and you, too, you traitress!" glaring at the maid. "What did I hire you for?"

"As maid to Miss Madge," replied Kittie.

"Yes, but what was the understanding between us. Why do I pay you twice as much as you asked? Wasn't it to keep an eye on your young mistress and report to us if she encouraged the attentions of any young fellows in the neighborhood? And this is the way you are doing it—helping your mistress to deceive me. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? If you aren't you ought to be."

Kittie remained silent, but she didn't look as if her conscience disturbed her very much.

"Who were the boys who had the nerve to enter my house without my knowledge?" he said, turning to Madge.

"I don't know what makes you think that any boys were in the house," she said.

"Oh, you don't, miss? Isn't this ladder evidence enough? And if it isn't I've got a witness down stairs who saw two boys climb up into the vacant room, and saw the ladder thrown down so they could get up. In the face of that evidence do you deny that the fact isn't true?"

"Who is this witness?" asked Madge.

"Who is he? A very proper young fellow named Noah Wood."

"Noah Wood!" exclaimed Madge.

"Yes, Noah Wood."

"Noah! What a name!" tittered Kittie.

"What's that to you, young woman? It isn't yours."

"I should hope not. It's a good name for talebearers and sneaks."

"Eh? How dare you call him a talebearer? He very properly brought me the information, and I'm going to reward him for it."

"I would; then he'll be more like John Judas and his thirty pieces of silver."

"You're impertinent, Miss Drew."

"I guess my tongue is my own," muttered Kittie.

"What did you say?" asked the captain, suspiciously.

"I was only thinking, sir."

"Shall I bring up Noah Wood and let him tell his story?" said the captain to his niece.

"I wouldn't see the wretch," cried Madge. "I hate him!"

"I dare say, because he discovered your piccadilloes. You admit your guilt, then?"

"I've got nothing to say."

"No, of course not. Who is this chap that Noah Wood says is a printer at the Record office? Oh, yes, his name is Joe Hooker. How came you to know him?"

"I met him at Sunday School."

"And you encouraged him to call on you?"

"Stuff and nonsense! I am surprised that you should care to associate with a working boy. You ought to look higher."

"Joe isn't very tall I'll admit, but he's as smart as any six-footer in shoe leather," said Madge with some spirit.

"How do you know whether he's smart or not?"

"I know he is," said the girl, confidently.

"Bah! Suppose he is smart, he's only a working boy. You must give up his companionship. He isn't worth thinking about. In fact there is nobody in this vicinity who is good enough for you."

"Give up Joe? No, that I never will do."

"But I say you must. Do you understand me?" said her uncle, waxing wroth again. "I'll set a watch, and if he comes around again I'll have him arrested for trespass. Who is the other boy? Another working boy I'll be bound, since they come together."

"He's Kittie's friend."

"Your maid's friend, eh? So, that accounts for her faithlessness to my interests. She sold me out in order to enjoy the society of her friend on the sly, too. Well, I won't have this sort of thing any more. And to begin with I'll get you a new maid."

"I won't have a new one," said Madge, decidedly. "Kittie is good enough for me."

"She isn't good enough for me, and I'm paying her her wages. You'll pack up to-morrow, young lady, and leave the house," he said, turning to Kittie.

"Don't you do any such thing, Kittie," said Madge.

"What's that? How dare you interfere with my arrangements, Madge? I am your legal guardian, and you have no right to question my authority," roared the captain.

"I don't care if you are my guardian. You have no right to make me unhappy," cried the girl, beginning to cry.

Tears in a woman's eyes always got the captain's goat, and particularly when the eyes happened to be his niece's.

The last thing he thought of was to make her unhappy, and so he began to take water.

"Well, well, don't cry, Madge. You know I can't stand that. I know I'm an old fool, and that I don't always do the right thing. My one desire is to make you happy, my dear, so we won't say anything more about your maid going. She shall stay if you want her to; but I don't want any more of these goings on. Promise we now, you'll do as I wish. I think only of your interest, and—and I don't want to lose you. I don't want any man or boy, be he rich or poor, to deprive me of the only solace I have in my old age," said the captain, his voice shaking. "I shan't live long anyway, and when I am gone you will be your own mistress and can do as you please, and marry whom you choose."

Madge was a good girl, and had an affectionate disposition. She was very fond of her irascible old uncle, and when he showed the tender part of his nature it got her goat, too.

She threw her arms around his neck and asked him to forgive her, and promised to be good henceforth, and do all he wanted her to; but, with a little sob, she didn't want to give Joe up. He was the finest (sob) boy in the world, and it really wasn't fair (sob) to deprive her of his friendship. She would send him word that he musn't call at the house again without her uncle's permission, so there wasn't any reason why any watch should be set to try and catch him.

"Well, we'll see," said the captain, soothingly, as he patted her head.

"You'll let me see him once in awhile, won't you, uncle," said Madge, coaxingly.

"I'll think about it," said the old man, not caring to commit himself to the proposition.

"Say yes, you good-tempered old dear," said Madge, patting his cheek.

"Now you're trying to wheedle me. I won't be wheedled. I'm not good tempered, either. I'm very ill-tempered."

"Now, my dear uncle——"

"Marlingspikes and jibbooms! I don't wonder they say that a pretty woman can turn a man around his finger, for you do about as you please with me. Go to bed now. I'm going down stairs, for I left that young man, Noah Wood, in the ante-room, and I promised to reward him for his information. There, good-night," and the old skipper hurried away.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN PECK MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"We had another close call that time, Joe," said Tom, as they rowed down the river to the boathouse.

"You're right we did. I wonder how the girls made out?" replied Little Joe.

"I couldn't guess, but I guess there's no evidence against them."

The boys went home and turned in.

About eleven next morning the foreman came over to where Joe was correcting a form for the jobber presided over by Tom and told him that a gentleman wanted to see him out in the counting-room.

"A gentleman!" said Joe. "What does he look like?"

"I didn't see him. The boy brought the message in."

Joe wondered who the visitor could be, but couldn't guess. When he went out he nearly had a fit when he recognized Captain Peck.

"Oh, lord!" he ejaculated. "The fat is in the fire, I'm afraid."

"Are you Joe Hooker?" asked the captain, sharply.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe, with the utmost politeness.

"You called at my house last evening and saw my niece, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"By way of a boat and a rope ladder?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it your customary way to meet young ladies on the sly?"

"No, sir. I prefer the front door; but when the main entrance is interdicted I generally stay away. In the case to which you refer I took the liberty, with Miss Madge's permission, to effect an entrance on the quiet. That method was not without risk, but I never figure on that. I suppose you have come to pull me over the coals. Well, I plead guilty and tender you an apology for acting contrary to your wishes. I admit that I had no right to intrude on your premises, even to keep faith with so charming a girl as your niece, for you are her guardian, and have the right to bar me out if you choose to do so. I hope you won't blame Miss Madge, for I put the idea in her head and furnished the rope ladder. If you think I ought to be punished for my conduct I will submit to any reasonable penalty you choose to inflict. I think that is fair, Captain Peck."

The captain had not come there to get Joe's scalp, though he intended to hand him a good talking to, but Joe's open and manly way of admitting his guilt, and taking all the blame on his own shoulders, quite mollified the skipper.

He expected that the boy would try to lie out of the matter, or at least take shelter behind any kind of an excuse that promised to help him out.

The captain was a curious combination of contrary sentiments.

It was the hardest thing in the world to know how to take him.

When he came to the Record office he was dead sore on Joe.

When he left ten minutes later he thought the lad was the only boy in the town worth shucks.

And wonderful to relate he voluntarily gave Joe permission to call on Madge by way of the front door.

How did Joe accomplish such a miracle?

By his personal magnetism.

He unconsciously hypnotized the captain.

That is really the secret of success in life, if you add a few other necessary qualities such as determination, ambition and energy.

When Joe told Tom at noon about Captain Peck's visit and its happy results his friend could hardly believe his ears.

"Do you mean to say he told you you could call and see his niece?" he said.

"He certainly did, and he was very nice about it, too," replied Joe.

"Well, if that doesn't get my goat. And he didn't give you a wiggling about last night?"

"Nary wiggling. He was mildly sarcastic at first and then became positively friendly. He shook hands with me when he left."

"I don't see how you did it. Why you know Kittie says he's a regular fire-eater when things don't jibe with him, and certainly the way we called on the girls last night was not calculated to sweeten his disposition. Something must have been wrong with him. His liver must have taken a day off. Such a miracle can't possibly hold out. When you do call, tugged out in your glad rags, he might set the dog on you. If I were you I'd go slow, and wait till you saw your charmer first," said Joe.

"I'm willing to take the chances," laughed Joe.

On the following afternoon Joe got a note from Madge, the first he had ever received from her.

She explained all that had taken place after he and Tom had made their hurried exit from the unoccupied room.

"I thought I should have died when I saw my uncle returning from the vacant room with the rope ladder on his arm," she wrote. "I knew that Kittie and I were in for a hot time. And it was hot, believe me, for awhile. My gracious, nunkey was mad enough to make the sparks fly. I pretended to be brave, but I was just shaking in my shoes. And Kittie got hers, too. But after all the explosion no damage was done. Nunkey and I kissed and made it all up again. He's a dear old darling in spite of his temper, and I love him very dearly. Now who do you suppose was the cause of all the trouble? Why that hateful Noah Wood. He saw you and Tom rowing up the river, watched you climb up the wall into the room, and then went and told my uncle all the facts. Isn't he the tell-tale and sneak? Uncle handed him a \$5 bill, but I don't believe he has any great opinion of him. Uncle wanted me to give you up, and promise to have nothing to do with you any more; but I just wouldn't agree to such a thing. He said you were only a working boy, and that I ought to look higher. Now, after all that, the strangest thing has happened. Really I'm so surprised that I can't make up my mind whether it really is true or not. What do you think? He says he's going to let you call on me by way of the front door. I nearly had a fit when he told me that. I couldn't believe it until he assured me that our friendship had his O. K. Now what do you think of that? Such a change of heart doesn't seem natural, but he's passed his word and that's something he never breaks. Under these delightful circumstances I shall expect to see you here on Sunday evening. Kittie wants you to bring Tom, but I'm afraid that would be pushing a good thing too far. We'll try and make them happy later. That's all now."

"MADGE."

Joe was delighted with Madge's letter, and, of course, he was pleased to death to receive her invitation to call on Sunday evening.

On Sunday evening Joe presented himself at the Peck "castle" and was admitted without question by the gardener.

He spent two hours very pleasantly with Madge, who told him that her uncle had placed the time limit at ten o'clock.

She said he would be welcome every Sunday evening, but the captain barred any other night.

Joe said he would fall in with whatever arrangements the old man made, as he was the doctor, and so when he left it was with the understanding that they would come together again on the following Sunday.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CACHE OF GOLD.

The Record was issued on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings.

When the hands knocked off for dinner on those days they each received a copy of the paper.

After eating his meal on the following Tuesday, Joe opened up the paper to read the latest news before going back to work.

Tom did the same.

Joe was glancing over the first page when his eye was arrested by a long clipping from a St. Louis daily which was headed: "A Cache of Gold."

The young printer was interested at once.

The story went on to state that somewhere in the State of Missouri, the exact locality being involved in doubt, there existed a buried treasure, the estimated value of which was a quarter of a million in gold coin.

The money had been hidden by a Frenchman who had set out from the East with it, intending to cross the plains with one of the wagon trains that periodically left St. Joseph for the land of the Golden West.

His purpose was to start a bank in the young and hustling city of San Francisco.

His steps were dogged by an enemy whose object was to murder him and steal the fortune in gold.

Becoming aware of the plan of his pursuer he endeavored to throw him off the scent by taking an unfrequented route across Missouri.

In this he succeeded, but his success proved fatal to him.

He lost his way in the wilds, and his pack mules died one by one until he was stranded many miles from the nearest village.

Unable to carry his gold further he made a cache of it, a prevailing custom at that time, and then, with the last of his provisions, struck out for the Missouri River.

After incredible hardships he finally reached the village of Plunketville more dead than alive.

Three days later the fever that was on him carried him to his grave, but before he died he told the man who attended him about the cache of gold, and gave him directions how to find it, all of which the man took down on a piece of paper.

It was some time before the lucky possessor of the paper found the chance to look up the cache.

He never reached it, for he was overhauled by some ruffians on the way, who shot him and took his mules and what money he had.

They overlooked, or paid no attention to, the paper, which was found on the skeleton many years after by a prospector on his way to the Colorado mining district.

The prospector found the cache, but because the locality was infested by a gang of bandits he did not deem it prudent to carry off at the time more than a small part of the gold.

He located in Corinth, built himself a substantial house on the suburbs, and proceeded to enjoy life.

One day a letter came to him which greatly upset him.

Immediately afterward he hired a gang of men and surrounded his house with a high brick wall, the top of which bristled with spikes.

Several months passed away and then it became generally known around town that the prospector had shut the house up and had gone away.

He never returned, and after many years the county authorities took possession of the building and it was sold to a well-known politician for a mere fraction of its value, owing, it was said, to the fact that the house had acquired a ghostly reputation, curious sights and sounds having been seen and heard there.

The fate of the prospector, however, was revealed the other day by a man who was brought in a dying condition to one of the St. Louis hospitals, said the paper, and when informed that he had no chance to recover, he told the nurse the story of the gold cache.

He said he was one of a gang which had been searching for the money for years, but though they were sure they had hit upon the locality, they had failed to discover the cache.

Having found out that the prospector was possessed of the secret, they had used many devices to get it from him, but failed.

Finally he ran out of money and he started for the cache to secure some more of the gold, and they nabbed him on the way.

On searching him they failed to find the paper containing the directions, but judging he knew the way by heart, they threatened to kill him unless he led them to the treasure.

This he promised to do, but during the night he made his escape.

They started in pursuit, and next day found his lifeless body at the bottom of a deep, rocky gully into which he had fallen.

They left him there, and several of them paid a secret visit to his house in Corinth and stayed there a week, searching it from cellar to roof for the paper, but failed to find it.

And so, as far as he knew, the cache of gold still remained in its original hiding-place, only a portion of it having been taken away by the prospector at the time of his first and only visit.

When Joe reached the last word the whistle blew for the resumption of work, so with his mind in a tumult of excitement over the knowledge that he held the paper that pointed the way to the cache of gold, the existence of which now appeared to be positively assured, he hurried into the job-room of the Record office.

We venture to say that he thought more about the buried gold than he did about the work he was engaged on, with the result that he made a number of blunders which got upon the foreman's nerves.

What's the matter with you this afternoon, Hooker?" growled Buckley, when Joe handed him the stone proof of a four-page cover he had locked up for a quarto-medium jobber, and the foreman saw that the first page was imposed where the fourth page should have been.

"Nothing, sir," replied Joe. "What's the trouble? Anything the matter with that job?"

"Oh, no, there's nothing at all the matter with it," said Buckley, sarcastically. "Look at it."

Joe looked the proof over and saw where the trouble was. "I don't see how I came to do that," he said.

"You must have been dreaming about that pretty girl who called on you last week. Just fix that over and charge the time to distribution. This is the fourth mistake you've made

this afternoon—more than you've made in two months. Aren't you well?"

"I'm all right. The trouble is I've got something on my mind, and I can't help thinking about it."

"Something unpleasant, eh?"

"No, it's something quite the opposite."

The foreman stared at him.

"Well, get busy," he said, walking to his desk.

Joe fixed the form and carried another proof to the foreman, who, after looking it over, handed it to the proof-reader for final revision.

The foreman handed Joe a card to set up, the first line of which read "The Cash Store."

When Joe handed the proof to the reader, the first line read "The Cache of Gold."

The reader corrected the job and brought it to the boy.

"What were you thinking about when you set that first line, Hooker?" he said. "Been reading a dime novel at dinner hour?"

"I guess I'm off my base this afternoon," replied Joe when he noted his blunder.

Five o'clock finally came around and Joe started home with Tom.

"Did you read that Cache of Gold story in to-day's Record?" asked Joe.

"No. What about it?"

"Read it when we get home and then you'll see."

"Can't you tell me about it? It'll save time."

"I'd rather you'd read it first."

"Cache of Gold—did somebody find a treasure?"

"Never mind. You read the story."

"I will, bet your boots. It must be something unusual for you to put it to me this way," said Tom.

No sooner had the boys reached their cottage home than Tom pulled his copy of the Record from his pocket.

"What page is the story on?" he asked.

"The first," replied Joe, as he started to change his clothes.

Tom found it right away and began to read it.

Before he got half through it he began to see what it referred to.

"Say, that must be the cache you've got the paper about," he said.

"It is," said Joe.

"Some chap found it, I suppose, and that's how the St. Louis newspaper got hold of the story."

"You read on and you'll see."

Tom read on to the end.

"According to this the gold is there yet, because nobody could find it without the paper you discovered in the prospector's house," he said. "If I were you I'd take that paper and go and search for it."

"That's just what I intend to do. There seems to be a fortune awaiting the discoverer of the cache. I ought to stand the best show of finding it, as I have a line on its locality, and full directions to pick the exact spot out when I get on the ground."

"That's right," nodded Tom. "When do you think of starting on the job?"

"Right away, and I want you to go with me."

"Me!"

"Sure. I don't care to go alone, and I wouldn't want to take any stranger with me, for he'd want half, probably, and then might do me up to get the whole. Now if you will go, I'll give you a third of the treasure if we find it."

"A third! Gee!"

"Will you go?"

"Like a bird. I'm sick of feeding presses."

"All right. We'll throw up our jobs on Saturday, and start Monday."

CHAPTER IX.

PLANNING THEIR TRIP.

Madge will be surprised Sunday night when I tell her that we're going to leave town," said Joe, after supper.

"She won't like it," said Tom.

"Oh, yes, she will, for if we find the gold I'll stand a better show with the captain."

"We'll be swell guys then. No more typesticking or press-feeding for us. We can open a bank."

"You can open a bank if you want to, and loan money without security to tramp printers, but I'm going to be a capitalist, and loan my money out on bond and mortgages."

"And marry Miss Mason, I suppose," grinned Tom.

"I wouldn't mind if the captain let me, but I don't imagine he will, even if I was worth a million. He objects to her getting married at all till he hops the twig."

"I'm glad Kittie hasn't any strings on her. If I come back with fifty or sixty thousand, all I'll have to do will be to hold up my finger and she'll become Mrs. Tom Bland right off the reel."

A knock at the door interrupted them.

"Come in," said Joe.

The lady of the house opened the door and said:

"Here is a note for you from Miss Mason, Joe. A boy just left it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Foster," said Joe, taking it.

He tore the envelope open and began to read it.

The news it contained rather staggered him.

"I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Captain Peck is going on a trip to see an old friend, and he intends to take Madge and Kittie with him."

"The dickens!" exclaimed Tom, much astonished.

"They'll be gone maybe a month. Madge says they're going right away, and that she will call at the office and see me tomorrow for a few minutes."

"This is sudden."

"I should say so. Madge hopes we won't be lonesome while she and Kittie are away."

"I don't think we will if we're going to start after that treasure on Monday."

"That will be a little surprise I'll have to spring on her tomorrow when she calls at the office."

"One good turn deserves another," grinned Tom.

The boys then began to talk about their trip to the country thirty miles back of Plunketville, and to figure out what they needed to take with them.

"Suppose we find the cache, how are we to carry the gold away?" said Joe. "As there is supposed to be a good pile of it, it will weigh considerable."

"We can borrow a horse and wagon, I imagine, at Plunketville to carry us to the ruin, and we'll load the gold on that."

"Maybe we wouldn't be able to get through the woods with it," said Tom. "The paper says we've got to pass through a wood before we get to the ruin."

"That's so. I guess it will be safer to hire a pair of horses or mules, with an extra one to help carry the treasure. We've got to carry three or four days' grub with us, anyhow, for I calculate it will use up a day riding there, another, say, on the spot, and a third in coming back."

"Will our funds stand the strain?"

"They'll have to. I've got \$135 saved up. How much have you?"

"About fifty," said Tom.

"That ought to see us through easily enough."

The boys continued to talk their plans over till they turned in, by which time they had everything settled, as far as they could foresee.

Madge called at the office next day.

"Isn't it just provoking that I've got to go with my uncle on that trip?" she said when Joe came out from the job-room.

"It will be a nice trip for you. What are you kicking about?" replied Joe.

"Why, aren't you sorry to lose me?" she said, with a pout.

"Sure I am, but seeing as Tom and I are going on a trip ourselves, we'd have to part for awhile, anyway."

"Why, where are you two going?" asked the girl, in surprise.

"We're going on a hunting expedition."

"Hunting expedition—in summer?"

"Surest thing you know."

"What can you hunt at this season of the year?"

"Some people hunt for jobs at this season because work is so dull, but that isn't what we're going after."

"What then?"

"Do you know what a cache is?"

"Cash is money, of course."

"I don't mean that kind of cash, though the one we're after has money in it. I mean a c-a-c-h-e," said Joe, spelling the word. "Generally speaking, a hole in the ground or place for hiding provisions and keeping them fresh. Old-time hunters and Arctic explorers adopted it for the purpose named. The cache Tom and I are going to look for is a buried treasure."

"How foolish! Where do you expect to find such a thing?"

"You leave that to us. I've got a dead line on it."

"I don't believe you're going away," said Madge. "You're just trying to fool me."

"All right, then we'll say no more about it. When do you start on your trip?"

"Saturday morning."

"Where are you going?"

"Somewhere out in the western part of this State, near a small town called Plunketville."

"Plunketville!" exclaimed Joe.

Madge nodded.

"Well, I'll be——"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," said Joe, recovering himself and thinking of the surprise he and Tom would treat the girls to if they met out there. "You're going to take Kittie with you?"

"Yes, for company, and because a maid is useful."

"Your uncle is going to visit an old friend of his, I think you wrote me?"

"Yes. He's got a ranch about twenty miles from Plunketville."

"You'll have all the horseback riding you want out there."

"Yes, that's the delightful part of it."

"Well, good-by, Madge. I've got to get back to work. Sorry I can't give you a kiss, but it will keep till we meet again."

"Haven't you got a cheek!" blushed the girl.

Joe laughed, and they shook hands and parted.

"What do you think, Tom," said Joe, as he and his friend were washing up at the trough at quitting time. "Madge and Kittie are going to a ranch near Plunketville."

"Get out! You don't mean it."

"That's what Madge told me to-day when she called to say good-by. Wouldn't it be great if we met them out there?"

"What's to prevent us calling on them? Whose ranch is it?"

"I didn't think of asking her."

"Then you ought to be kicked. However, I guess we will be able to find out. They wouldn't be astonished to see us; of course not. Did you tell Miss Mason that we were going on a trip, too?"

"I did, but she didn't take me seriously."

"So much the better. We'll give the girls a surprise."

On Saturday when the foreman handed the boys their pay envelopes they astonished him by saying that they were going off for a week or longer.

"How do you know I can spare you?" said Buckley to Joe.

"I'm afraid you'll have to, as the trip is an important one for me."

"Is Bland going with you?"

"He is."

"Well, don't stay longer than a week."

"I can't guarantee that. It will depend on circumstances."

"Where are you going?"

"To the western part of the State."

"Going to see a relative?"

"No; I haven't any."

"Then you are taking a vacation?"

"That's about the size of it."

"I wish you luck, but I'll look to see you both back a week from Monday."

Joe and Tom spent the afternoon making their final preparations for their trip, and on Monday morning they took a train that would land them at Plunketville.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOYS MEET MADGE.

The boys reached Plunketville Monday night and put up at the cheapest of the two hotels.

They were in time to get supper, and after eating it they sallied forth to look the town over.

It had expanded considerably since the Frenchman who made the cache of his gold died there.

Then it was but an insignificant little village, standing in lonesome solitude on the banks of the muddy Missouri, and having little communication with the rest of the world.

Now it was a big bustling town, with two banks, a semi-weekly newspaper, several blocks of business houses on its main street, and an opera-house above a hardware store, not speaking of numerous other improvements.

Other villages and towns had sprung up near it, and a trunk railroad had a small station on the outskirts.

The country round about which had been a wilderness in the Frenchman's time was now cut up into farms and ranches.

Roads ran in many directions, and the country as a whole was now well populated.

These facts the boys learned from the proprietor of the hotel.

"There's an old ruin, isn't there, about thirty miles to the southwest?" said Joe.

"Yes," said the landlord. "It is all that remains of a church and other buildings erected by Catholic missionaries close to one hundred years ago. They settled in the State, which was not a State, or even a part of the Union, at that time, but just an untrodden wilderness, for the purpose of converting the Indian nation who lived within the precinct of what is now Missouri. The venture was probably not a great success. At any rate, the ruins have been there for sixty or more years."

"Who does the property belong to now?"

"The Catholic Church claims it. It includes several square miles, covering the whole of a large wood on this side of the ruins, and a mile of woods beyond it. It is the one patch of wilderness in the State."

"It's a wonder it hasn't been sold to settlers."

"The Church is at loggerheads with the State over the title. Time and again the matter has been brought up in the courts, but no settlement has ever been reached. A year or two ago the Legislature took up the matter and settled it in favor of the Church, which has a big influence in politics, but the Governor vetoed the bill, which left matters as they were before. It is said that the difficulty is going to be compromised so that the land can be sold to farmers."

"We would like to go to those ruins. What is the easiest way of getting there?" asked Joe.

"The easiest way would be for you to go to Chester Village, twelve miles from here, and from there proceed by another road to Blackville, ten miles further on. From there a third road will take you to the wood, where it branches off. A bridle path goes through the wood, and that will bring you close to the ruins. It's a fair day's journey, horseback, though, and you are likely to meet nobody after you enter the woods except the charcoal burners, who are practically trespassers, though I never heard that they have been interfered with. I wouldn't advise you to go straight there from here, as you would arrive at the ruins so late in the afternoon that you'd either have to camp out there or ride back to Blackville after a short stay, and you couldn't make the village till after dark. The better way is to stop at Blackville over night and start from there next morning."

Joe thought that suggestion a good one and decided to adopt it.

Next morning he and Tom hired two saddle horses, the third one to be secured at Blackville, which was only eight miles from the ruins.

The fact that the country was so much more settled than they had figured on greatly simplified the plans they had formed, and did away with the necessity of their taking any provisions with them, except for the last stage of their trip to carry them over in case they found any difficulty in locating the cache.

The boys had provided themselves with a small revolver each before leaving Corinth, but it seemed doubtful now if they would need any such protection.

With a village within eight miles of the ruins there did not seem to be any special risk before them.

Still, the charcoal burners might be assumed to be a rough set, and if they ran foul of them on their way back with the gold, they might find the guns very useful.

The boys left Plunketville about ten next morning and reached Chester shortly after noon.

They took dinner at the inn there and then proceeded to Blackville, where they arrived about five and put up for the night at the village hotel.

On the following morning they secured a horse, and a pair of panniers.

Providing themselves with a stock of ham and tongue sandwiches, two pies and a half dozen bottles of soda water, they started for the woods, which they could see in the distance.

The road was good and they went along at a swinging gait. They had covered half the distance to the wood when from a branch road a girl dashed toward them on horseback.

She wore a rough-and-ready costume, the skirt being of ordinary length, and a kind of cowboy hat with a turkey feather in it.

She could certainly ride like a house afire.

She rapidly overhauled the boys.

"By George!" exclaimed Joe. "If that isn't Madge."

"Hanged if it isn't," said Tom.

They reined in and waited for her to come up.

When she got near she recognized them and uttered a little scream of surprise.

"Why, boys," she cried, "what brings you here?"

"Didn't I tell you we were going on a hunting expedition?" said Joe.

"I thought you were fooling," she said. "I'm awfully glad to see you both. Kittle will have a fit when she learns you are here. Where are you stopping?"

"We're not stopping anywhere," replied Joe. "We've been on the move ever since we left Corinth."

"Where are you bound for now?"

"For an old deserted ruin on the other side of the wood yonder, about seven miles from here."

"Do you mean the church ruin? Mr. Morgan, at whose ranch we are visiting, was telling us about it last night. I should love to go there. Won't you take me with you?"

"I should be glad to do so, but we don't expect to come back right away."

"You mean that you're going further on?"

"No. We are going to do our hunting there, and there is no telling how long it will take us to find what we're after."

"Why, what are you going to hunt for?"

"I told you at the office that we were going to look for a cache."

"So you did, but I thought you were talking nonsense."

"No, there's no nonsense about it. We expect to find a buried treasure. Didn't you see that story in the Record about the Cache of Gold?"

"Yes, yes. It referred to the man who built the house we are occupying at Corinth."

"Exactly; and it spoke about a paper that gave the clue to it."

"Yes, I remember it did."

"Well, I've got that paper."

"You have?" she exclaimed.

"You remember the paper I found the night I hung outside the wall?"

"Yes."

"That's it. It was hidden in the wall, and the thunderbolt dislodged it from its hiding-place."

Madge was greatly surprised.

"Wouldn't that be fine if you found the money?" she cried.

"And the ruin, you say, is only seven miles from here. Really, you must take me with you. I could come back alone. What's a seven-mile ride?"

"No, I wouldn't let you ride through that wood alone. I've been told that there are a number of charcoal burners living in it, and they might hold you up."

"They wouldn't attack a girl like me," said Madge.

"I wouldn't trust them, for I dare say they are rough men. If you insist on going with us we'll take you, but we'll see you through the wood if we fail to find the cache within a reasonable time."

The matter being arranged, the three rode forward in high spirits.

Madge told them about Mr. Morgan's ranch, which was of considerable extent.

"If Kittle was able to ride I'd have had her with me," she said.

"When you don't turn up for dinner what will your uncle do?" asked Joe. "He will think some good-looking fellow has run off with you."

"What nonsense! He'll think I've lost my way, and will get Mr. Morgan to send one of his men after me."

"That won't do a whole lot of good, for he won't have any idea where you really are. He'd never think you went into the woods."

"Never mind, I'm bound to get back to the ranch some time," said Madge.

By this time they reached the edge of the woods where the road branched off.

The bridle path the boys had been told about was plain enough, and taking it they rode into the big stretch of woods which had been there for hundreds of years.

It proved to be a perfect wilderness of trees, two or three miles across, and the sunlight penetrated it only in spots.

Not a sound, other than that made by the feet of the four horses, broke the stillness of the place.

Not a bird fluttered from branch to branch, nor an insect hummed in the warm summer air.

Aside from the charcoal burners, whose proximity they had no knowledge of, there appeared to be no life, other than themselves, in that great wood.

There was hardly any verdure on the ground, which, excepting the path, was thickly covered with dry leaves.

The gloom and the silence somewhat affected the spirits of the young people.

"I don't think I'd care to pass through this place alone after all," said the girl. "It's too lonesome. I'd imagine there was a tramp hidden behind every tree."

"You needn't be afraid while we're with you. Tom and I each have a revolver," said Joe, reassuringly.

"You might need them to protect the gold if you find it," said Madge.

"That's why we bought them in Corinth before we set out."

They passed through several clearings on their way, in one of which stood the remains of a deserted hut.

At length they came to a spot where another path, equally as clear as the one they had been following, joined it.

They came to a halt while the boys deliberated as to which they ought to take.

It was impossible to solve the problem, so Joe tossed a penny.

"Heads we'll go to the right; tails to the left," he said.

The coin turned up heads, and to the right they went.

Fifteen minutes later they rode into a considerable clearing where a half dozen kilns were smoldering in charge of a dark-skinned, hang-dog looking man.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED BY MASKED MEN.

The charcoal burner eyed the three young people curiously. He did not offer to approach them, however.

Joe decided to ask him for information.

"Say, mister, where does this path lead to?" he inquired.

"It leads further into the woods," replied the man, grimly.

"Then we can't reach the old church ruin by following it?"

"Is that where you're bound?"

"Yes."

"You should have kept to the main path then."

"We didn't see any difference between this and the other."

The man made no reply.

"We'll have to turn back," said Joe, guiding his horse around.

The other two followed his example.

"So you are goin' to the old church ruin, are you?" said the charcoal burner.

"We are," answered Joe.

"What do you expect to see there?"

"We've heard a good deal about the ruins so we came over to see them."

"What have you got that other boss for?"

"We're carrying our lunch on that."

"Oh, you are?" said the man, scratching his stubby chin and eyeing the pick and spade attached to the animal. "Got any whiskey in them panniers?"

"No," replied Joe. "You're a charcoal burner, aren't you?"

"Looks like it, sonny, doesn't it?"

"How many charcoal burners are there in these woods?"

"Thar might be more or less," replied the man, with a solemn wink.

The fellow's manner indicated that he didn't feel like stating facts.

"Do you keep these fires burning all the time?"

"I reckon, except when they're out."

"You send your charcoal to Plunketville, I suppose?"

The man nodded.

"Let's get on," said Tom.

"Here's a quarter, mister, for setting us right," said Joe, tossing the man the coin.

He caught it without moving, looked at it and dropped it in his pocket, then he watched the young people depart.

The boys and their fair companion had gone about a hundred yards when a shrill whistle resounded through the woods from the direction of the kilns.

"What's that?" ejaculated Tom.

"A whistle. The fellow we just left made it, I guess," said Joe.

"I didn't like his looks."

"Neither did I. They're a tough lot, I judge, these charcoal burners."

"I hope we're not going to be molested."

"Why should we be?"

"That whistle sounded suspicious. He's probably calling some of his associates to tell them about us. He knows where we're bound. We may find them at the ruins waiting for us."

"Oh, I guess not. I don't think they'd dare attack us, for when we got back to the village we could make trouble for

them. It wouldn't pay them to have their business interfered with or broken up."

They rode forward at a quick pace and by and by reached the junction of the two paths.

They took the other one and in the course of fifteen minutes came out of the wood into a large space, the size of a city block, thickly covered with brush and tangled vegetation, with a solitary tree here and there.

"That looks like the ruins yonder," said Joe, pointing straight ahead.

"I guess you're right," said Tom, "but from here it doesn't seem to amount to much."

They dashed forward and soon halted close to the only opening the straggling wall had in sight.

"We'll tie the horses here, and then we'll go in through that doorway. It is the one mentioned in the paper," said Joe.

The three horses were tethered to a tree and then they entered the ruin.

There was very little of the original structure left.

The stones lay about in all directions, singly and in piles.

All the rest of the space, which had once been the interior of the building, was thickly obstructed with tall and rank grass.

"I'm afraid we're going to have something of a job making out the marks that we need to take the measurements," said Joe. "There's the tree which is the first one, and the point from which we must start. You've got the tape measure, Tom, get it out. Here is the pocket compass, which the man I bought it from guaranteed to work as exactly as a large instrument. Fetch that stone yonder while I beat down this grass."

Tom brought the flat stone and dropped it at the foot of the tree on the spot indicated by Joe.

Little Joe laid the compass on it.

"Here, take the end of the tape and walk slowly off in that direction," said Joe, pointing.

Tom obeyed orders.

"Halt!" cried Joe. "Do you see a stake near you? Look down in the grass. It may only be a few inches above the ground."

Tom looked around, pushing the grass aside, but didn't seem to find what was supposed to be there.

"Hold the tape here, will you, Madge, while I go and help Tom?" said Joe.

The girl, willing to make herself useful, took the boy's place and Joe hurried forward to where his friend was engaged.

"Don't seem to be any stake here," said Tom.

Joe pulled the grass up in chunks and tossed it aside, and crawled around on the ground over the space of a couple of square yards.

It began to look as if they were stumped at the start, when Joe found the stake.

It was almost rotted away.

However, that didn't matter since they had found it, and proved to some extent that the directions on the paper had foundation in fact.

Having accomplished the first lap the second was to find another stake in another point of the compass.

Another flat stone was procured and placed beside the rotten stakes and Tom started ahead again with the end of the tape.

When Joe stopped him he began the search for the second stake, and presently found it, and in much better condition than the other.

The third measurement was taken to a third stake, and that led them slap against a wall.

The directions said follow wall to door on right and then measure to fourth stake.

"Go and get the spade, Tom, and we'll soon see if the gold is still there. At any rate the ground doesn't look as if it had been disturbed for some years."

Tom hurried away to get the article.

"I guess I'll need the small pick we brought along, too," said Joe, after looking at the ground. "Run after Tom and tell him to fetch it, Madge."

The girl hastened to do his bidding.

Left alone, Little Joe began pulling up the grass from the spot where the digging was to be done.

While bent over his eyes were attracted to some object not far away.

He bent the grass down to look at it and was surprised to find that it was a small fat-looking bag.

Laying hold of it he found it was quite heavy.

Lifting it up he saw that it was apparently a money bag.

made of stout cloth, which, however, had rotted in places owing to long exposure in the grass.

Out of one of the rotten places fell into his hand several gold pieces of the denomination of \$10.

"Gracious! Here is a bag of the gold that the prospector evidently dropped when he was here, and went off and left it on the ground. I judge there must be four or five thousand dollars in it. If the treasure is all in bags of this size they won't be so difficult to handle. Well, this is something even if I fail to find any more. It will pay for coming here. But I feel confident that I shall find the rest of the money by digging for it. I tell you it's better to be born lucky than rich," said Joe.

Just then he heard a noise behind him.

Thinking it was Tom returning he turned around and said:

"See, Tom, what I found."

Then he stopped and stared at the sight that met his eyes.

A dozen roughly attired men, in masks that entirely covered their faces, with large owl-like holes for their eyes, were stealthily advancing upon him.

For a moment he stood aghast, seemingly unable to move, then as the men made a dash at him he sprang for the inside doorway, with the bag of gold clutched tightly against his chest.

Darting through it he rushed for the outer doorway, with the bunch in full chase.

Tom and Madge were returning after their visit to the horses.

The scene they were unexpectedly treated to quite staggered them.

Joe appeared at the entrance, flushed and excited.

"Something is up," exclaimed Tom.

Something surely was.

The door was suddenly blocked by several men, one of whom seized Little Joe and started to drag him into the ruins.

The boy struggled desperately.

Finding escape impossible he flung the bag of gold toward Tom and Madge.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR FRIENDS NEARLY ESCAPE.

As the bag of coin hurtled through the air, Little Joe was dragged out of sight.

One of the masked men had appeared at the top of the wall and he ordered two of the crowd to seize Tom and the girl.

Tom jumped in front of Madge and downed one of the rascals with his spade, but the other fellow jumped in and laid hold of him.

He put up such a fight that the leader of the bunch ordered two more of the masked rascals to take a hand in the capture, and in a minute or two Tom was helpless in the grip of two, while a third took Madge by the arm.

The bag of gold lay unnoticed on the ground, having been forgotten in the fight.

Tom and Madge were marched inside the ruins, and taken into the inner part of it where they found Little Joe guarded by a couple of men while a third one was tying his hands behind his back.

Tom was treated in the same way, and then the three were lined up before the man who appeared to be the leader of the gang.

"What brings you people to these ruins?" he demanded, roughly.

"That's our business," replied Little Joe defiantly.

"It's our business, too, for we are the boss of this ranch. We've been watching you since you came, and the measurements you have taken clearly show that you have a clue to the Frenchman's gold. In fact you have the long missing paper which shows the exact spot in which it is buried. That paper I now have, and we will take care to make use of it. We have hunted a long time for that money without success. We did not think it was in such an open spot. At last, thanks to your coming, we shall be successful."

"Who are you chaps anyway? You have no right to the contents of the cache. It belongs to me. If you rob me of the money I'll see that you are hunted down and put in jail," said Joe.

"We shall take care to keep you close prisoners until we have secured the gold and are outside of the State with it. Then it will matter little to us what you may do. We are masked, as you see, and consequently it will be impossible for you ever to identify one of us even if we were followed and

caught, which is not likely to happen. We will let you have the pleasure of witnessing the digging up of the gold," said the leader.

He consulted the paper and then gave orders for two of the men to fetch spades and dig at the indicated spot.

The digging began at once, and the two rascals who took hold of the job made the dirt fly.

At the end of fifteen minutes they were relieved by two others, and so the work went on with unflagging zeal and good speed.

The chief watched the work with eyes that sparkled through his mask.

The required depth was reached but with no results.

"Keep on," he cried impatiently.

Four feet downward was excavated and yet there was no sign of the buried gold.

The leader then ordered the hole to be enlarged.

This was done but the result was the same.

"Dig a trench up to that stake," he ordered.

The trench was dug to the depth of over four feet, yet nothing turned up.

"Blame it! What does this mean? Can it be that the prospector carried away all of the gold?" he cried. "Yet that cannot be for he came back for more. Some mistake has been made in the measurements."

The leader picked up the tape measure used by Joe and Tom and taking one of the men outside with him began the measuring all over again, following the paper directions carefully.

Joe, and incidentally Tom as well, were surprised that the rascally bunch failed to find the cache at the indicated spot.

Apparently, had they not been interfered with, they would have had a lot of trouble without finding the object of their search.

Joe began to think now that the prospector had got away with all the money.

And yet if he had why should he return to the ruins, as he evidently was doing at the time he was captured by what seemed to be the same gang as now held the upper hand of the young treasure seekers?

That was something which could not be explained.

The results of the leader's measurements tallied with that made by the boys.

The hole was still further enlarged, but with no success.

The leader was now in a very bad humor and his crowd were, without doubt, much disappointed.

After digging a hole of several yards dimension, and going down over five feet, operations came to a stop.

"I'm mighty glad that you fellows have done all that digging and saved us a lot of disappointing work," said Joe. "We both seem to be left on the treasure, and it's some satisfaction to know that we're not the only disappointed ones."

The leader glared at the boy.

"Take them to the vault and tie them to the rings in the walls," he ordered, fiercely.

"What do you mean to do with us?" asked Joe.

"You'll find out in time," said the leader, angrily.

"You'd better let us go, so we can take this young lady home or the country around here will be scoured for her, and when we are found it will go hard with you."

"You won't be found unless we choose to let you go," hissed the leader.

The young people were walked into another section of the ruins, a trap door was opened and they were forced down a flight of stone steps into a gloomy underground room lighted by a lantern standing on a stone block.

The roof was supported by pillars of some thickness.

These pillars were not round but square stone posts.

An iron ring was imbedded in several of them, for what purpose it was impossible to say, but possibly the missionaries who built the church found it necessary to imprison one or more Indians at times.

Joe, Tom and Madge were tied each to a ring and left to their own reflections, which were not at all pleasant, as the reader will agree.

"This is mighty rough on us," said Little Joe, "and particularly on you, Madge. It is too bad that you insisted on coming with us."

"I've been kicking myself ever since I was caught, because I didn't use my revolver on those rascals. I could probably have laid out two or three of them for keeps, but I never thought of the gun," said Tom. "You didn't use yours either, Joe."

"No, I put my trust in my legs, but they nabbed me before I could get clear of the ruins," replied Joe.

"Well, we've got the revolvers yet, for they didn't search us," said Tom.

"What good are they to us in our present shape? Say, Madge, they didn't tie you very tight. See if you can't free yourself from that ring. If you can do it you could set us free, for I've a knife in my pocket with which you could cut the cords," said Joe.

Madge, who was keeping up bravely under the serious circumstances she found herself in, started to make an effort.

She had not more than begun, before the trap was lifted and a couple of the masked men came down.

They brought a keg apiece forward, and seated themselves on either side of the stone block.

One of them produced a pack of cards and they engaged in a game of poker.

They played for the best part of an hour, and then they were called up by the leader.

During the time they were in the vault the prisoners did not exchange a word.

As soon as the men were gone they resumed conversation.

Once more Joe called on the girl to try and free herself.

"I suppose those chaps got that bag of gold I tossed to you?" said Joe to Tom.

"I couldn't tell you; but where did you find it?" asked his friend.

Joe explained how he got hold of it.

"There must be four or five thousand dollars worth of ten dollar gold pieces. Since we've missed the treasure that would come in very handy for us; but I guess it's lost to us now."

"Those fellows are sure to find it, if they haven't got it already," said Tom.

"If they'd searched me they'd have found our united savings in my pocket."

"I guess they didn't consider us worth searching."

"So much the better. I don't care to be stranded so far from home."

"We'd have to walk the ties like hamfat actors if we were cleaned out."

"How are you coming out, Madge?" asked Joe.

"Not very well," she replied. "The knot won't come untied."

"Keep at it. Everything depends on you."

The boys talked while Madge worked at the knot.

"It's beginning to give," she said at last.

"Good," said Joe, encouragingly.

In a little while Madge triumphed over the knot, and freed herself from the ring.

"Now, then, put your hand in my right pocket and you'll find my knife," said Joe.

It only took the girl a moment to pull out the knife.

With it she speedily cut the boys free, not only from the rings but from the bonds which held their hands behind them.

"Now, how are we going to escape from this place?" asked Tom.

"Through the trap, of course," said Joe.

"But those rascals are in the ruins above. They'll see and nab us again."

"We'll stand them off with our revolvers and make a running fight of it."

"Where can we run to? They've taken our horses without doubt, so we are stranded, and won't have much show to get away."

"We must do our best," said Joe, in a determined tone.

He led the way up the steps, but just as he raised his arm to push up the trap it was opened in his face and a masked man started to come down.

The rascals were surprised to find the boys armed, and blamed their stupidity in not searching them.

They could not understand how their prisoners had freed themselves, but the fact remained that they had.

However the three were trapped anyway, and must give up in the end.

They slammed the trap-door down and rolled a stone on it.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Tom.

"Look around and see if there's any other way out," said Joe.

They discovered a tunnel leading off somewhere and Joe, who felt it necessary to watch the trap-door, told Tom to investigate it.

Tom did so, but had not proceeded far into it before he heard voices of men approaching and he judged that the rascals intended to attack them that way.

He ran back and warned Joe.

"We'll have to fight them back," said Joe.

"But if they should come down the trap, too, we'll be between two fires."

Joe seized the lamp to place it where its light would shine on the opening of the tunnel.

As he did so he saw a small barrel standing against the wall marked "Powder—dangerous."

To lay hold of it and roll it toward the entrance of the tunnel was the work of a moment.

Tom and Madge, seeing the nature of it shrank back in terror.

Joe, with his iron nerve, battered the head in with the butt of his revolver.

Then he rolled the keg into the tunnel and hastily laid a train from it into the vault.

Not hearing any further sounds from the rascals, Joe crept forward to investigate.

He ran against one of the men who was in advance.

The fellow grabbed Joe, but the boy managed to wriggle free.

He darted back into the vault, struck a match and ignited the powder train.

The fire darted along the ground like a sputtering serpent.

Before the rascals could surmise what was coming a tremendous explosion shook the ruins and the earth around it.

The whole bunch was blown out of existence, and the young people in the vault stunned into unconsciousness.

The tunnel was completely blocked up with fallen earth and stones, and a great hole was made in the ground above.

Only four of the gang had been sent in through the tunnel to capture the girl and the two boys.

The rest, with the leader, were in the open air.

The explosion took them by surprise, and they were thrown into a kind of panic.

The leader, however, remembered about the keg of powder which had been stowed away in the vault, and he believed that in some way that had exploded.

Under such circumstances he concluded that the prisoners, as well as his four men, were dead.

Calling one of his companions he ran to the trap door and threw it open.

The fumes and smoke of burnt powder came rolling out.

It seemed strange to him, however, that the explosion had not taken place at the spot where the powder keg had been kept, but somewhere in the tunnel.

"I don't understand this," he said to his men, who had come up and were gathered around the trap-door. "That was evidently the powder keg that went off. But why should it blow a hole yonder instead of in the vault where it was standing? The whole roof of the vault ought naturally to have fallen in, instead of which it doesn't appear to be injured at all. That hole is in the tunnel."

The men stared at him but said nothing, while they watched the decreasing smoke as it rose out of the open trap.

"We'll have to make ourselves scarce for awhile, for the explosion may have been heard clear to Blackville, which is only eight miles away, in which case people may come out here to learn what has happened. First we'll see whether our prisoners are dead. There seems to be no doubt of that fact, for if the shock didn't kill them outright, the powder fumes would be likely to finish them," said the leader.

They waited till the worst of the smell had dispersed and then the leader, accompanied by several of his men, went down.

They found the two boys and the girl stretched out just as they had fallen.

"They're goners," said one of the rascals.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXPLOSION.

The fellow saw the prisoners who had freed themselves and uttered a shout.

Then he drew a revolver, but before he could point it at the boy Joe fired at him.

He staggered back and fell into the grass.

The man's shouts, coupled with the report of the revolver, brought a bunch of the men to the spot and Joe saw that it would be impossible for them to make their escape, so he backed down the steps, and with Tom, prepared to keep the ruffians at bay.

The leader examined the supposed corpses but found that they were not dead by a good deal.

He ordered them to be removed to the outer air, and they were carried up into the afternoon sunshine and laid on the grass.

The leader then made an examination of the vault and tunnel.

A section of the latter had been destroyed and the tunnel completely blocked up.

The vault itself appeared to have suffered no particular injury.

This fact was a source of satisfaction to the chief of the masked men, for it was used as a rendezvous by the gang occasionally, who, when not disguised, carried on the vocation of charcoal burning in the woods.

The leader saw that the powder keg had been moved from the place where it had been kept and placed in the tunnel.

As his men wouldn't do that, he judged that the prisoners must have done it in a desperate attempt to open a route to freedom.

Or it was possible they supposed the whole gang was coming at them through the tunnel and they took that means to put them out of business, taking the chance of escaping themselves.

While the young people lay unconscious in the open air one of the rascals took possession of the revolvers on the boys, and also the \$100 that Little Joe had on his person.

Joe looked as if he had caught the worst of the explosion, for his face was much blackened by powder smoke, and so the leader guessed he was the one who set the powder off.

"That chap must have an iron nerve to do such a thing," muttered the leader, as he looked at Joe. "And he's only a little fellow, too. I don't see how he escaped at all. The other two were probably at the extreme back of the vault, and were not shocked so much. If we hadn't been on hand to open the trap and let the powder fumes out at once, the three would have been suffocated."

The men thought they ought to have met that fate as they had caused the death of four of their companions, who were buried in the debris of the tunnel.

After the lapse of an hour Tom and Madge came to their senses and found themselves surrounded by the gang.

The leader questioned Tom about the explosion, but got little satisfaction from him.

He finally admitted that Joe had rolled the powder keg into the tunnel when they heard men approaching the vault through the tunnel, and had set it off by means of a train of powder he had laid into the vault.

He said he remembered nothing except seeing a bright flash and feeling as if he had been hurled into space.

Madge's sensations were somewhat similar, but she did not express them.

Two hours having elapsed since the explosion, and no one having as yet showed up to investigate the matter, the leader guessed that it had not attracted attention.

The men were hungry, having missed their dinners, and so the chief ordered Joe to be carried down into the vault and left there.

Madge and Tom were ordered to go down themselves.

"I don't see what you're going to gain by keeping us prisoners," said Tom.

"I may let you go by and by and I may not, just as I think best," replied the leader.

"It's a shame to tie this young lady up to one of those posts again."

"Neither of you will be tied this time. You can move around there as much as you please now. We'll see that you don't escape through this trap, and as the tunnel is blocked up you can't escape that way. Go down."

Tom walked down much against his will, but there was no help for it, and Madge followed him.

The trap was closed upon them and a heavy stone placed upon it.

Satisfied that their prisoners were secure the gang removed their masks, hid them in a certain spot, and then started for the woods.

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE JOE'S BIG BONANZA.

Madge was much concerned over Little Joe.

His continued unconsciousness alarmed her, and she was afraid he might die without regaining his senses.

She sat down on the floor, took his head on her lap, and asked Tom what he thought about his friend's condition. "Oh, he'll come around all right, don't you worry. He caught it heavier than we did, that's all," replied Tom, reassuringly.

"I wish he'd open his eyes and speak to us," she said.

"So do I. I wonder if there's any water in this place that we could throw in his face," said Tom.

He looked around, and found a jar of it with a cup in a corner.

He also found part of a bottle of whiskey.

Madge bathed Joe's face with the water, and Tom poured some of the whiskey down his throat.

Their ministrations proved efficacious, and Joe opened his eyes and saw Madge bending over him.

"How do you feel, Joe?" she asked, anxiously.

"Feel! What's the matter with me?"

"Why, you've been unconscious for a long time."

"The dickens I have!" exclaimed Joe, sitting up. "What happened to me?"

"Why, don't you remember about the explosion?" asked Tom.

"What explosion?"

"The keg of powder you set off in the tunnel."

Tom's words brought his recollection back and he began to remember setting off the train of powder and then he could hardly say what followed.

"So the explosion knocked me out, eh?"

"Yes, and it knocked Madge and me silly, too," said Tom.

"Did it?"

"Yes. When we came to we found ourselves out in the open air, and you lying on the grass beside us."

"How did we get there?"

"Those rascals came down here after the explosion and carried us out."

"They did; but we're in the vault now."

"They put us back here."

"But you're not tied up; neither am I."

"They didn't consider it necessary this time as the tunnel is blocked up by rocks and dirt caused by the explosion."

Madge told Joe everything that had happened after she and Tom recovered their senses up to the time they were returned to the vault.

"Well, they seem to have us dead to rights, and blowing up the tunnel didn't do us any good. Some of those rascals must have been killed or badly hurt," said Joe.

"Four of them are buried in the dirt of the tunnel."

"Well, that's their own fault. If they had left us alone nothing would have happened to them."

"The chief of the gang said he might let us go by and by and he might not, just as he felt about it," said Tom.

"I don't understand what reason he can have in holding us."

"That's what I told him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing as to why he's holding us."

"It's funny that the people don't hunt these chaps down. They must know they are here. Did you hear Mr. Morgan mention them, Madge?"

"No."

"They appear to have been in this neighborhood some time, and their chief object seems to have been to find that cache of gold."

"They're not likely to find it now," said Tom; "nor anybody else. The gold has clearly been removed—if not by the prospector by somebody else who accidentally got on to it."

"I don't believe the prospector took it all away; at any rate according to the story of the man who died in the St. Louis hospital he didn't."

"Well, we've had plenty of evidence that it isn't buried where the paper indicated."

"That's true enough."

"And that let's us out."

"By George!" exclaimed Joe, feeling in his pockets, "those rascals have got away with our money, Tom. That puts us in a hole."

"I'll get my uncle to lend you enough money to take you back to Corinth," said Madge.

"Will you? We'll need it," said Joe. "The ruffians have taken my gun, too."

"And mine," said Tom.

"I wonder what they're doing now."

"I think they've gone somewhere to feed," said Tom.

"How do you know?"

"Heard them talking about being hungry. And that reminds me that I'm hungry as thunder."

"So am I, and Madge must be also. None of us has had

anything to eat since breakfast. That provender we brought from Blackville would taste mightily good now. I suppose that gang has got away with it all."

"It's bad enough to be held prisoners down here out of the light of the day, but if they half starve us into the bargain, it will be twice as rough."

"We'll have to grin and bear it. I'm going to take a look at the effects of the explosion," said Joe, picking up the lamp.

Tom and Madge followed him into the tunnel.

They didn't have far to go before they found evidences of the blow up.

Little Joe planked himself near the side of the tunnel, as close to the roof as he could go, and spreading his legs apart began throwing the loose dirt between them, the stuff falling behind him in a shower.

Suddenly a part of the wall gave way beside him, and buried him up to the middle, and a heavy round object rolled out in front of him.

Joe pushed it away, thinking it was a stone, and it rolled down in front of Madge, who saw it was a bag full of something.

Madge stooped and picked it up.

"My, but it's heavy. Joe, look, this is a bag of money," she said.

"What's that?" cried Joe. "Bag of money! By George, it is," as she held it up. "Where did you find it?"

"You threw it down here."

"I did! Oh, I took that for a stone. It came out of the wall here. Hand me the lamp."

Madge reached it to him.

He held it in the hole from which the earth had caved, and there he beheld a score of similar bags stacked up in the excavation.

"Hurrah! The cache of gold at last. I've found a big bonanza!" he cried, exultantly.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Tom clambered beside him to take a look.

He speedily saw that Joe had made no mistake about it—the gold was there.

It took about fifteen minutes to free Little Joe.

"We must cover the bags up till we get out," said Joe. "Hand up the one you have, Madge."

He replaced it in the spot from which it had fallen, but in doing so he dislodged more dirt and another cave-in took place higher up, disclosing the light of day.

The second dirt slide nearly hid the bags of gold.

"There's a hole," cried Joe. "We'll be out of this prison in fifteen minutes."

He began clearing the dirt away as fast as he could work, and soon widened the opening so that he could thrust his head up through it.

Not a soul was in sight.

He pulled himself out.

"Wait down there, you folks, till I investigate the situation," he said.

He walked into the third section where the trap-door was, rolled the stone off it and opened it.

Then he shouted for Tom and Madge to come up that way. They lost no time in doing so.

Joe led the way into the second section where the digging had been done in vain for the treasure, and from there into the first one where the outer door was.

Looking out they saw no one in sight.

"Why there are our horses," said Tom. "The rascals never took them away."

"So much the better. Come on and let us see if our grub is still in the panniers."

The three made a rush for the tree where the animals were tied, and Joe thrust his hand into one of the panniers.

Nothing had been touched.

So they went back and got the bags from the tunnel and fastened them on the extra horse and started.

They had not a great way to go to reach the woods, and soon struck the bridle path that led through to the road connecting with Blackville.

It happened, that at the very moment they disappeared among the trees several of the charcoal burners started for the ruins with some food for the prisoners.

The reader can imagine their surprise when they found the trap door open and prisoners gone.

They hurried back to tell the chief of the gang, but by the time they had told their story the young people were already a mile on their way through the woods.

The leader of the gang, never dreaming what a rich prize was slipping through his hands, decided not to organize any pursuit of the prisoners.

And so the three young people pushed ahead unmolested, with the money from the cache of gold—Little Joe's big bonanza—in their possession.

Every moment while they were in the woods passed in a fever of apprehension lest they might encounter the masked ruffians.

Nothing like that happened, and in due time they issued from the woods on to the road and with a feeling of intense relief turned their faces toward Blackville.

"I guess we're pretty safe now," said Joe.

"Yes. I'm willing to gamble on that," replied Tom.

"We'll stop at the inn to-night and go to Plunketville in the morning," said Joe.

"Why not come with me to Mr. Morgan's ranch?" said Madge. "I'll guarantee you will be welcomed. He will furnish you with better means for carrying the money to Plunketville. That horse which is carrying it belongs in Blackville, and you'll have to return it, or arrange for sending it back from town. I think you couldn't do better than come to the ranch."

"All right," said Joe. "We'll go. With so much money in our possession I dare say we would be welcome anywhere. Won't your uncle be surprised to see us here, and perhaps he won't have a fit when he sees all the gold we have."

So when they reached the branch road, where they met Madge that morning, they turned into it, and after a ride of a little over a mile reached the ranch.

Madge's all day absence had thrown Captain Peck into a fever of anxiety.

Mr. Morgan sent a man out around noon to look for her, presuming she had lost her way.

When he returned with no news of the girl, two other men were despatched on the same errand.

They returned a short time previous to the appearance of the young people, and the captain was in a fit over the report.

Preparations were under way for a more extensive search when Madge and the boys rode up to the front porch.

Captain Peck rushed over and grabbed his niece in his arms, asking her where she had been so long.

"I've been with Joe Hooker and Tom Bland," she replied.

Then the captain took notice of the boys and his surprise was complete.

Kittle was tickled to death to see Tom, and the feeling was reciprocated.

The boys were introduced to the ranch owner, and he extended the hospitality of the ranch to them.

When they showed the twenty-five bags of gold coin, the contents of the cache of gold, which everybody in that vicinity had heard about, both the ranch owner and Captain Peck were paralyzed with astonishment.

Joe told the story of their strenuous experience with the masked band, and all agreed that the adventure was a rough one, though it had turned out most satisfactory in the end.

The captain thought that Joe had taken the most desperate kind of chances in exploding the keg of gunpowder in such a place, and said it was a miracle they had not all three lost their lives.

The boys remained several days at the ranch, having a good time with the girls, and then Mr. Morgan took them and the treasure to Plunketville in his light wagon.

The money had been boxed, ready to be shipped by express to Corinth, and the train that carried it also took the boys, too, so that both reached the town at the same time.

The money was deposited in the head bank and after it was counted the cashier paid Joe over the sum of \$125,000 in bills.

One-third of that Joe presented to his friend Tom, according to his agreement.

Neither of the boys returned to the job room of the Rec office, but under the guidance of Captain Peck loaned their money on bond and mortgage, and with a part of their capital went into business together.

Eventually Joe married Madge and Tom made Kittle his wife, and both became successful business men on the fruits of little Joe's big bonanza.

Next week's issue will contain "TOO LUCKY TO LOSE OR, A BOY WITH A WINNING STREAK."

CURRENT NEWS

An army of roaches, dislodged by fire in the home of Frank Keeser, of Elizabeth, N. J., recently made the front steps so slippery that several firemen fell.

R. O. Green, of New York, and M. H. Hayden, of Detroit, 3 weeks ago coasted down Pike's Peak, five miles, on a greased board that shot down the mountain railway track in five minutes and thirty-seven seconds.

Towering far above all of his fellow passengers Ivan Romanoff, a young Russian giant, arrived at New York in the second cabin of a German liner lately. Romanoff comes here to challenge both Hackenschmidt and Gotch. The Russian is 6 ft. 8 inches in height, weighs 220 pounds and has a chest measurement of 56 inches. He is twenty-eight years old and only recently went into training as a wrestler.

A newsboy was the first depositor when the United States postal savings bank opened in Newark, N. J., at 9 o'clock in the morning. He is Louis Walnor, otherwise known as "Frenchy," and is sixteen years old. He lives in West Kinney street. He had just \$1 to put in the bank, and he had waited since 6.15 o'clock in the morning to have the honor of being the first depositor. The bank did a good business during the day.

William Lally, a young machinist, was eating supper with his parents in New York city the other night. Some one rang the bell, and Lally, who was carving the roast, jumped up with the carving knife in his hand and hurried toward the door. He slipped on something and fell face downward on the knife, which penetrated his left lung. Dr. Grossman of the Lebanon Hospital, who responded to an ambulance call, said that Lally was seriously injured and might die.

Fishing is all the rage in Paris at the present time. If the Parisians have one passion, it is for fishing; and they love to fish in the Seine, where only the smallest fish are caught, and these not in great abundance. Now, there are not enough worms to be found in the soil and one of the smaller industries is to make "articots," that is, to produce worms from foul matter. Men sell these "articots" to the fishermen, and they are certainly the nastiest and most disgusting things in creation. M. Faur has for years had a lucrative business in producing these fish-worms.

The first of the largest guns ever constructed in the United States has just been removed from the workshops of the Washington navy yard, preparatory to being mounted on one of the dreadnaughts. It measures 53 ft. 6 inches in length, and weighs sixty-five tons. It has cost \$84,000 and an additional \$53,000 will be expended for the mounting. The shell discharged by the gun weighs 1,400 pounds. Including the shell and powder it costs \$700 for each discharge. The initial velocity of the shell leaving the gun is 2,600 feet a second. The shell is effective at a distance of twelve miles.

The Zeppelin dirigible balloon Schwaben, with six passengers on board, arrived over Berlin on her recent trip, thereby completing its 350-mile journey from Baden Baden. The big airship encircled the city of Berlin and then proceeded to Potsdam, where it made a successful landing. The Schwaben will remain only one day at Potsdam, as the projected "harbor" for dirigibles there has not yet been completed. The moderate interest aroused by the arrival of the air vessel was in striking contrast to the enthusiasm displayed by the people on a former occasion when a Zeppelin dirigible balloon visited Berlin.

In many London streets, as was pointed out in a recent note, there is no No. 13. Even hard-headed business men seem to have an aversion to this number, which is lacking from Threadneedle street, Tokenhouse Yard and London street. In one street, however, bearing a singularly unlucky name, superstition is boldly defied. For many years past a flourishing manufacturer has located his city offices at No. 13 Friday street—an address which seems eminently fitted to be the headquarters of the Thirteen Club. Mr. Pierpont Morgan, too, defies fate by housing his store of priceless art treasures at No. 13 Prince's Gate.

The new Northwestern depot, Chicago's latest \$20,000,000 improvement, will be in operation this fall. A similar railway terminal project by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company will ultimately harbor several other trunk lines, also at a cost of many millions. Operations are already under way, two-thirds of a city block having been purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and the buildings torn down to make room for new tracks and terminal facilities. The balance of the block is occupied by a progressive bicycle house with an international trade, and the new railroad plans give them a blank wall over two hundred feet long and nearly a hundred feet high facing Madison street at the river.

On the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina the returned students are now examples to their people of industry, sobriety and good citizenship. At the boarding school which the federal government maintains on the reservation practically all of the Indian employes are graduates or returned students from Carlisle. The young man who is commandant of the boys is a Carlisle graduate. Besides his other duties, he is the handy man about the place, being in charge of a model school farm and teaching industrial work. He is married and well thought of by his superiors. One of the day school teachers is a Carlisle girl. The school engineer is a Carlisle boy, as are also four other members of the school and agency force.

"Why did the bicycle go out, and why didn't it come back, like the roller-skate, etc.?" we asked this question of the Mead Cycle Co. They replied: "We carry our principal American banking account at the First National Bank. Last summer over a score of the bank officials and clerks who live in the suburbs visited our place and purchased bicycles. Almost without exception their reason (as well as the reason of a thousand others we sold) was, 'I rode a bicycle a dozen years ago. I need exercise and have found nothing to equal the bicycle for that purpose. The automobile is all right in its way, but it doesn't give exercise.'" The Mead Cycle Co., Chicago, U. S. A. (or Liverpool, England), will be pleased to send a beautiful catalogue showing bicycles of all grades, on request.

Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, former president of the United States and honorary vice-president of the Boy Scouts of America, has just written an article on citizenship for the new Scout manual. In it he says that the Boy Scout movement is proving in a practical way of great importance to the country. He points out that the Boy Scout principles make for efficiency in a boy's life, patriotism and citizenship. In outlining the ideals of boyhood he says that the Boy Scout movement promises to bring into the boy's world more and more the Golden Rule. Colonel Roosevelt urges the Scouts to see that gangs of toughs do not make the playgrounds impossible for children. He points out to the boys that the qualities of good Scouts make for success in business and urges upon them the importance of unselfishness, gentleness, strength and bravery.

San Diego, Cal., has just started a big farm to raise Exposition flowers. The Panama-California International Exposition is to be held in 1915 in San Diego, and two of the principal features of this exposition are to be the floral and horticultural exhibits. When it came to considering ways and means of procuring the huge amount of flowers, vines and trees necessary, the projectors were dismayed to find that it would be impossible to secure the quantities wanted without going to enormous expense and gathering them from every State in the Union. It remained for Director General D. C. Collier to solve the problem by declaring that the plants would be propagated right in Balboa Park in San Diego, a tract 1,400 acres in extent, in which the Panama-California International Exposition is to be built. The city park commission was called in, the proposal was made and adopted enthusiastically. The city purchased outright two huge nurseries. Over thirty acres were prepared for the propagation work necessary at once. Experts were called in and the work began. Thousands of plants were set out. The park commission called on the people of the city for cuttings of every description. They were forthcoming. It took 100 men weeks to set these out and see that they "scarred" properly.

\$1,000 A DAY

OR,

A FIGHT FOR FIVE LIVES

By HORACE APPLETON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER III. (Continued)

"'One of the five,' were the words spoken by the torpedo thrower. I wonder who the fifth one is. The millionaire's family consists only of himself and his three sons, four persons in all. Yet I am convinced that five lives are threatened. Else the words of the villain are meaningless."

Kenmore discerned the indication of a strange mystery, and he said:

"Employ Thomas Darrell, he is a good officer, and he will protect your family and ferret out your foes."

CHAPTER IV.

\$1,000 A DAY.

"No," said Mr. Raymond, decidedly, "you are the man for me in this case. You have already made me your debtor in gratitude by saving the life of my son. You must also make me your debtor financially by assisting me now."

"I really wish I could do so. But as I have already stated to your son, I am so bound by previous engagements that I cannot."

"But, Kenmore, this is a matter of life or death for my sons, and perhaps, also myself. Startling, improbable though it may seem, I believe we are all marked men—marked for death. I have always been a good friend to you, I ask you to help me now?"

"But my engagements? In your case there will be great labor and expense. Especial shadows will have to be provided to guard each member of your family. Men will also be needed at the same time to work to strike the trail of those who seek all your lives. The man who undertakes the case assumes a fearful responsibility. He virtually undertakes to guard and protect five lives."

"Five, sir. There are but four persons threatened, myself and my three sons."

"I was recalling the words of the torpedo-thrower," said Kenmore. "He muttered that your son Frank was one of the five."

"I know not who the fifth person can be. But now, Kenmore, I will not take no for an answer. I must and will have your services to help me in this battle for precious lives."

Kenmore shook his head negatively.

"All men have their price. Name yours, to put all your other business in the hands of others and devote yourself to the fight for the lives that are so dear to me?" said the millionaire, earnestly.

Kenmore remained silent.

"I'll give you a hundred dollars a day."

"No."

"Five hundred," said the millionaire.

"A thousand, then," he added, as Kenmore did not speak.

Then before the officer could reply a startling incident, and one that was destined to have a great influence upon Kenmore the detective, ensued.

The footman who admitted the officer entered the library.

"A note for Mr. Kenmore, if you please," said he, presenting an envelope on a silver server.

Kenmore took it while his face assumed an astonished expression.

"How any one could know I was here is a question that

baffles me, unless—but let me read the note," the officer muttered.

He tore open the envelope and hastily perused the message inclosed therein.

Then he brought his clenched hand down on the desk at which he was seated and exclaimed:

"We shall see! Mr. Raymond. I accept your offer of 'One Thousand Dollars a Day.' From this very moment I am yours to command!"

The aged millionaire sprang to his feet, his eyes kindling and his face aglow with delight.

"Bravo! This is the happiest moment I have known in a long time. Overshadowed by doubts and fears, as I have been for a long period, I have yet hesitated to call in detective assistance," he said.

"But the letter!" pointing at the message the officer had just received.

"Ah, yes, I will read it aloud."

"If you please."

Kenmore opened the letter again and read it aloud, while the millionaire listened in deepest interest.

The letter ran as follows, and it was written in pencil in a clear, bold and manly hand:

"Ward Kenmore, Detective:

"Sir.—This is to warn you not to accept employment professionally from Richard Raymond or his sons. If you do so you will be hunted down and killed. Dare to go contrary to this note and your death will be upon your own head."

The note was not signed.

"Ha!" exclaimed the millionaire. "My enemies shadowed you here. They thought to intimidate you. Ha, ha! They did not know you or they wouldn't have attempted that."

"They dare me to go against them," said the detective, quietly, but with significant emphasis.

"And by doing so they unwittingly adopted the very best plan to draw you on their trail."

"Yes. But now since I am your chosen man for the fight for precious lives, let's get down to business."

"Yes, by all means."

"Then, the first question I would ask is this: What is the motive for your foes?"

"I do not know."

"Do you not suspect what it is?"

"I do not."

"Have you any known enemy who could be guilty of attempting to exterminate your immediate family?"

"No. Of that I am positive."

"Then to proceed. Who would profit by the death of all your family including yourself?"

"No one."

"You see I am seeking for a clue to the motive of the villain."

"Yes. I comprehend that."

"Who would be your heir? Who would inherit your millions in the event of your death and the death of all your sons?"

"No one."

"What?" surprised.

"That is to say, I would then have no living heir. With the death of my sons and myself, our entire family line will become extinct."

"Can that be? Then, in case of such a deplorable event, what would become of your estate?"

"It would revert to the State, unless by will I had specifically disposed of it in some way."

"Then there is no one, save your three sons, who could be benefited by your death—financially, I mean?"

"No, sir."

"There is no way whereby your enemies could in that event secure your fortune?"

"No. That I have clearly shown you."

"Then must we exclude money as the incentive of the enemy?"

"So it seems."

"The next most powerful motive for crime must, then, claim our attention."

"What is that?"

"Revenge."

"No one has cause to seek vengeance upon me."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am. I have always given and always demanded justice."

"Can you suggest the meaning of a fragment of a note I found in the pocket of the torpedo-thrower's coat? It alludes to a secret and some man, who has become the foe of the writer's sons in some sort of a vendetta."

"It is a complete puzzle to me."

"Well, there is little light to be gained, it seems, by reason of our clues. But in sending me the note, daring me to enter your service, the villain has given me a specimen of handwriting to use."

"And you have seen the faces of two of the villains?"

"Yes."

"That should count for something."

"It does, as I hope to prove."

"How will you set in to unearth the mystery, and protect my boys and myself while you are seeking to solve it?"

"I cannot explain now. Suffice it to say, rely on me. You will all be protected. A friendly hand will be ready at hand when it is needed to protect you all."

Kenmore arose as he spoke.

"Are you going?" asked the aged millionaire.

"Yes."

"When shall I again see you?"

"When I have any news for you, or you are in peril."

As the detective spoke his keen ears caught a certain sound that completely escaped the hearing of the older man.

It was a noise at one of the windows as if the blind had been rattled by some person without.

Kenmore smiled grimly as he thought.

"The men whom I am now pitted against may even now have their spy at hand."

He thought a spy might have seen and heard all that had passed between himself and Richard Raymond.

If so peril waited for him outside.

The night had now advanced considerably.

The moonlight yet remained, however, and the street-lamp burned brightly.

Kenmore shook hands with the millionaire and passed into the hall. The flunky "from over the watah" was there.

"Who left the note for me? I want you to describe that person," said Kenmore to the flunky.

"Hi will, sir. He was a small man with red hair and a bald head, sir."

"Old or young?"

"Young."

"What did he say when he gave you the note?"

"Honly that it was for Mr. Kenmore."

"Are you sure of that, my man?"

"Hi am, sir."

"Did the old man come inside the door?"

"No, sir."

"Then how did you see that he had white hair?"

"He took off his hat. He had the letter in it."

The detective was convinced before he had asked the flunky a question that he was a rascal. He had already virtually made him contradict himself.

Kenmore's suspicions of the flunky had been aroused by a circumstance which one not a detective might have overlooked.

The door bell had not rung since Kenmore was admitted.

The officer reasoned thus:

"In order to get the note to the flunky the messengers of Mr. Raymond's foes must have got the door open. Strangers could not have done so without ringing the bell."

So he concluded:

"The party who brought the note was known to the flunky

who tends the door. He got the door open by using some signal tap. The flunky is in the pay of the enemy most likely."

But Kenmore put yet another question to the lackey.

"Why didn't you open the door when the man rang the first time?" he asked.

The lackey turned red and stammered. It began to dawn upon him that he was under suspicion.

He backed away from Kenmore.

The detective made a sudden leap and caught him by the throat. The lackey could not utter a word.

Kenmore ran him into a small, windowless hall closet, slammed the door on him and turned the key in the lock.

"If you make any noise it will go hard with you, you treacherous rascal," said the detective, as he turned from the door.

CHAPTER V.

\$1,000 A DAY

Richard Raymond, the aged millionaire, had witnessed the scene in speechless amazement.

He could scarcely even yet comprehend it, or credit the detective's accusation that the lackey was a scoundrel.

"Really, really, my dear sir, I think you are wrong. William was recommended to me in the highest terms by Lord High Heels, the English nobleman who is going to marry the rich soap fat man's heiress across the way. And he's English, William is," said Mr. Raymond.

"Exactly," assented the officer.

Then he told his client why he suspected William.

"I feel that you wrong him," said Mr. Raymond, a trifle obstinately.

"Then he will soon be vindicated."

"How do you mean?"

"I want to borrow a suit of William's livery, and as William himself I'll venture forth presently."

"Bravo! A grand idea! Come with me to the fellow's room."

The old gentleman led the way up-stairs, and into a small room on the top floor.

In that apartment the officer found a suit of livery—a perfect duplicate of the suit "William" wore that night.

The detective put it on and found a pretty good fit. He found no difficulty in making up his face like the flunky's, for he carried a complete outfit for disguises of all sorts in his own pockets.

In fifteen minutes he was made up.

Then he left the house and walked to the adjacent street corner. Just as he turned the corner a man accosted him, saying:

"Hi, William! Why don't he come out?"

"You mean Kenmore?" said the disguised officer.

"Yes."

"He's talking with the old hulks in the hall."

"Well, here's the fiver I promised you for handling the letter. Keep a close watch on him—the detective, I mean—if he ever comes to the house again, and report what he says. But between you and me, I reckon you won't see him again," said the man.

"I'm haff for the night. Have a booze. Hi'll stan' the 'aff-and-'aff, or hanything ye likes."

"No. I've no inclination for drink. The work I have in hand for to-night requires a clear head. The detective is to be decoyed to his death when he issues forth from the house of the millionaire."

"So bad as that? Hi don't like hit."

"It matters not. You keep a still tongue in your head, or back you go to the convict settlement at Hobart Town, Australia. The honest Mr. William does not care to have it known that he is an English ticket-of-leave man, I suppose?"

"Hi will be mum. Not a word from William."

"Good! Now I leave you to do the work I have in hand."

The man turned toward Raymond's house.

The disguised detective went on in the opposite direction, and presently he turned a corner, and passed swiftly down an alley.

Five minutes later he again stood in the presence of the millionaire, in the latter's own house.

The detective had merely gained the rear of the residence by the alley, and obtained admission by the rear basement door.

"Well?" asked Mr. Raymond, "what have you learned? That you have wronged William?"

"No."

"Is it possible?"

"It certainly is," replied Kenmore, and then he went on to relate what had befallen him since he left the house.

"The man who accosted me and gave me the money I recognized," he concluded.

"Who was he?"

"The torpedo-thrower."

"Then why did you not arrest him?"

"You have hired me to work this case. Seems to me you ought to rely on a man whose services you value at a thousand dollars a day."

"So I do. So I do. I beg your pardon. Of course you will manage the case as you think best. I merely spoke as a non-professional might."

"No offense. Only if I had arrested the man I should have destroyed a chance to get at the mystery."

"I don't see how?"

"I am to be decoyed, he said!"

"Yes."

"Of course an effort will be made to decoy me into some dangerous place where your foes will consider it safe to show their hands and attack me."

"So I presume."

"The most likely place for the decoy to lead me to will be a retreat of the gang he represents. It is all important that I should find that out."

"I see."

"I mean to be led to the rendezvous of the villains."

"You will not get away again alive, perhaps."

"I take my chance of that. Such are the risks one must run in my profession. To be worth one thousand dollars a day one must forget there is such a thing as danger."

"But now no more talk. To change myself back to my real self, and then to be off to walk into the trap of the enemy," added the officer.

He ran up to William's room.

When he came down again it was in his proper garb, undisguised.

Mr. Raymond let him out of the house by the front door.

Kenmore walked briskly away.

But he had not gone far when something for which he was scarcely prepared occurred. A shrill scream, uttered by a female voice, reached his ears.

He turned and saw a beautiful young girl on the opposite side of the street, struggling in the arms of a rough-looking man, who was bearded to the eyes.

The lovely young girl stretched out her arms to the detective.

"Help! Oh, sir, protect me from this man!" she cried, entreatingly.

Kenmore was always the champion of the weak against the strong, and beauty in distress ever awakened his keenest sympathy.

So, for the moment forgetful of the fact that he was on the lookout for a ruse, and that his life was threatened by desperate men, he ran toward the girl and her assailant.

"Release that lady!" he cried.

"She is my wife!" retorted the man.

"It is false! He is an entire stranger to me," said the girl.

"She lies!" cried the powerful ruffian, and as Kenmore aimed a blow at his head, he caught the light form of the maid up in his arms as easily as if she had been a babe and fled with her.

Of course, the officer pursued.

The man ran swiftly with his burden and darted down a side street, from whence he entered an alley.

Kenmore pursued, and the young girl in the clutches of the ruffian continued to entreat him to save her.

Into the alley the detective followed the maiden and her abductor. But he would not have been so hot-footed in his pursuit if he had heard the whispers which passed between the girl and the man who carried her.

"Keep it up, Bina! Keep it up. You are drawing him on famously. If he only follows us into the house all will be well. He will be in our trap then," said the bearded man.

"Yes, Darwin. And then he cannot escape," said the girl called Bina.

Presently they passed through a small door, set deeply in the thick wall of a house on the alley.

The detective reached the door an instant subsequently and

threw it open. He was about to enter, when all at once a suspicion of the truth dawned upon him.

He asked himself if the girl who had lured him on by her cries for assistance might not be a beautiful decoy.

It flashed upon his mind, too, that there was something strangely familiar about the voice of the bearded ruffian.

Kenmore fancied that the fellow's voice sounded like that of the villain of the black coat, whom he had encountered in Riverside Park.

The detective, because of his suddenly formed suspicions hesitated about entering the house.

He all at once heard footsteps approaching, and acting upon a sudden impulse, he sprang into an empty hogshead that lay on its side near the door of the house in the alley.

A man went by and stopped at the door, where Kenmore had paused.

Just then the bearded ruffian appeared therein.

"Where is he?" exclaimed the man who came from within the house.

"Who do you mean—Darwin?" asked the other, and from his hiding-place Kenmore heard the words and saw the two men.

Then the concealed officer said mentally:

"Those men are the two rascals who caused the runaway at Riverside Park."

He listened intently to hear the next words.

"I mean the detective, Kenmore. I had him on my trail and I was leading him to a death-trap with Bina for a decoy. He was almost at the door, but now—surely you must have seen him?"

"No."

"This is singular, Niles."

"He must have taken the alarm and fled in the direction opposite to that in which I came."

"So it seems. What news of the night?"

"We have yet a chance to strike one of the doomed five before the dawn."

"Which one?"

"Oscar Raymond."

"Good. Where is he?"

"At a masked ball."

"Then we must go there."

"So I was about to say. I can secure admission. In fact, I have already purchased the tickets. You must accompany me at once."

"A word with Bina, and then I am at your service."

The fellow called Darwin disappeared for a moment and then returned.

"Now I'll go with you, brother," said he.

"So they are brothers, as I thought," mentally noted Kenmore.

"We have only to stop at a costumer's, whose establishment is close to the Elmore Hall, where the ball is in progress, to secure costumes and masks," said the man who had last arrived.

"Good. Lead on, and if you approve I will suggest a plan whereby we can deal the silent death to one of the marked five before the sun again rises," said he whom his brother called Darwin.

CHAPTER VI.

KENMORE MAKES A START TO EARN HIS HIRE.

Kenmore caught every word of the last murderous speech, uttered by Darwin.

The officer felt now that the case was opening in a rapid and thrilling manner, such as he had scarcely anticipated.

"Surely these men are the most desperate characters I have had to deal with in many years," he reflected. "The villains are going to make a second attempt at murder thus soon after the cowardly work looking to Frank Raymond's doom at Riverside Park."

Kenmore was inclined to regard the case as one of many mysteries.

He was a methodical man, who always began and worked out a case systematically.

First it was his custom to seek for the motive of a crime, for that once found the indices of the guilty party usually became visible.

But now he was baffled at the very outset in finding a

motive. He as yet could not divine why the five lives he meant to protect were threatened.

Of course, the mystery was increased by the fact that he as yet knew only four of the persons whose lives were imperiled.

He reasoned naturally enough that the fifth and unknown person was endangered for the same mysterious reason as the others were.

And therefore it was his assumption that the fifth life menaced was in some manner related to the others.

"Presumably the threatened person who is as yet unknown to me is related to the Raymonds," theorized the detective.

"Well, well, I can congratulate myself that I have stumbled upon most valuable clues right at the start, even though I have not found a motive for the conspirators," he added.

The incidents at Riverside Park in which he had taken part, were regarded by Kenmore as lucky for himself since that had given him a knowledge of the personality of two of the millionaire's enemies whom under other circumstances it might have taken him a long period to discover.

Chance is often the good genius of the detective, placing him in the way of clues which might escape his most carefully planned search.

The two conspirators moved off through the alley, and very soon a shadow was on their trail.

Kenmore had set in to track them, and if they eluded him they would baffle the keenest sleuth in New York.

And as he shadowed the dark visaged men, the officer mentally reviewed the incidents of that night of rapidly succeeding incidents and adventures.

"At all events," reflected he, "I know two of the men the millionaire, and his son have to fear. They are brothers—the one who threw the torpedo is called Darwin, the other is named Niles. Those are their given names. What their family name is will be discovered by me yet."

"But the girl, she whom Darwin called Bina, she did not in the least resemble the dark, evil-faced men. I wonder what she is to them!" he added.

Kenmore had obtained an excellent view of the face of the young girl who had assisted in the cunning ruse to decoy him into danger.

He had observed that the girl was fair, with blue eyes, white skin and light hair—a blonde in fact, and one of rare beauty.

The brothers, Darwin and Niles, being the direct opposite of the girl in every point of facial resemblance, were scarcely to be reckoned as the girl's relatives.

Kenmore was a physiognomist—a student of the human face.

Without a doubt of the certitude of his judgment, he arrived at the conclusion that the girl called Bina was not akin to the swarthy, black-eyed brothers.

And the officer's analysis of Bina's face, despite the contradictory evidence of her recent conduct, gave him an assurance of purity and goodness.

Therefore Kenmore was puzzled regarding the girl. She became to him an object of interest—a mystery yet to be solved.

He said in his mind:

"I must and will know more of that girl. She is in the confidence of the conspirators and working with them, but she is not of their evil nature; of that I am pretty well convinced."

It seemed to Kenmore as he further meditated that it might easily be that the girl Bina was a dupe—that some deception of which she was the victim had bound her to the service of the dark-visaged men.

Kenmore was not impressionable or romantic. A beautiful face could not fascinate him, and he was never the victim of an infatuation.

But some way the lovely features of the girl who had deliberately sought to decoy him into danger seemed to have become permanently stamped upon the camera of his mind.

Kenmore followed the brothers of the evil faces from the alley, and for a considerable distance.

He was not discovered, he believed, and at length he saw his quarry enter a costumer's shop but a few doors from Elmore Hall.

The detective took a favorable position for an espionage, and waited for his men to issue forth.

He knew that Elmore Hall was a popular dancing place, rented to any respectable organization who desired it from time to time.

Kenmore knew, therefore, that it was not a very "swell"

masked ball that was in progress there that night. The "elite" would not be present.

But the officer was aware that Oscar Raymond was a rather wild young man about town, who sought pleasure and amusement wherever his fancy chanced to lead him.

"It's fortunate I know young Oscar Raymond by sight, and I think I can recognize him even if he is en masque," thought Kenmore.

But he thought he would have a sure guide to the millionaire's son in the dark-faced men who threatened the young man's life.

"I shall know the villains' costumes after I see them come out of the costumer's. Then I shall only have to keep them in view at the ball to soon discover the mask they threaten," decided the detective.

He had some time to wait.

Fifteen minutes had elapsed after the brothers had entered the costumer's, and yet they had not reappeared.

Kenmore became uneasy.

A vague suspicion entered his mind that perhaps the men he had been shadowing had, so to say, "dropped" to his "pipe."

And if so, they would seek to blind their trail and throw him off.

Just as Kenmore was almost decided to make a decisive move of some sort, he saw the door of the costumer's shop open, and the proprietor of the place stood revealed in the doorway.

The small front shop was empty as the officer at once saw. If he had customers he would have been engaged with them.

"Is there a rear way from the shop?" said Kenmore.

Then he approached the costumer's shop. Late as was the hour, the old man kept his establishment open for the accommodation of the patrons of the masked ball, who were his customers.

"Good-evening, Lannier. Where are the two men who entered your shop but about a quarter of an hour ago?" said the detective to the old costumer.

"Ah! It is Monsieur Kenmore, the Vidocq of New York!" exclaimed the costumer, who was a Parisian.

"Yes. But of the men I spoke of?"

"They are gone, monsieur."

"Gone!"

"Certainment."

"But I have been watching for them. This door has not opened since they entered by it until now."

"The messieurs went by the rear door. They wished to enter the ball-room by the rear entrance. From the rear door of my shop the alley leads to the back of Elmore Hall."

"Did the men secure costumes?"

"Yes."

"What were they?"

The little beady black eyes of the crafty old Frenchman were covered by his hand for a moment, as he drew that member across his brow and replied:

"One assumed the costume of the Italian brigand! The other that of a black-robed monk. Both had black masks."

"A brigand and a monk. Strange comrades. Many thanks," said the detective.

Then he hastened in the direction of the ball, and as he went he reversed his coat, transformed his low crowned hat into a high silk one, and assumed a mask.

"I've not a moment to lose," he said mentally.

"The villains are already at the ball. I know not how soon they may deal the blow that threatens Oscar Raymond. Even now I may be too late to save the millionaire's son," reflected Kenmore, further.

He remembered that the dark-faced brothers had mentioned "the silent death." He wondered what they meant, and if they had any mysterious means of accomplishing murder.

Swiftly Kenmore traversed the distance that intervened between the shop of the costumer and the ball room.

Arriving at the door he experienced no difficulty in gaining admission by purchasing a ticket, for the ball was entirely a public one, given indeed in the interests of charity by a social club.

Upon entering the spacious ball-room, the detective found the festivities at their height.

The strains of a Strauss waltz filled the air with voluptuous melody, to whose entrancing music the merry masqueraders were floating about in the dizzy mazes of the most enticing dance.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

THE BUSINESS BOYS OF BLYBURNE

OR,

HOW THE WHEEL CLUB SAVED THE TOWN

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG

(A SERIAL STORY.)

CHAPTER III. (continued)

"By gracious, you're a lucky fellow!" cried Tom. "The colonel will be dead stuck on you for this. I only wish I had got in ahead."

But Tom's turn was to come, and it came at the scratch race on the Waukegan track.

The boys arrived at the little lake port in good time and entered the club.

All Waukegan had turned out to see the races.

The grand stand, gayly decorated, was crowded with ladies and gentlemen.

The handicap between the Chicago and Milwaukee clubs was run and won by the latter club.

The Chicagos took the mile dash, and then came the scratch.

The start was made in fine style, but it looked rather dusty for the Blyburnes when the half mile post was passed.

Then Joe Start, of Waukegan, was in the lead, and a young fellow whose name nobody seemed to know, but who was said to represent the Fort Hill Wheel Club, was second.

Behind them came Billy and Tom.

Not a word passed between them—a look was enough.

Then talk about scorching!

There never were two wheels sent ahead in such shape.

Tom got the start and held it to the finish, although Billy came in only half a wheel's length behind.

There was some tall cheering done by the Blyburnes then and the people on the grand stand joined in of course.

Tom felt an inch taller when the representative on the Western Wheel Company handed him the thousand-dollar purse.

"This is business!" cried Billy, as the Blyburnes crowded around. "This is a starter! Just wait! We'll save the town yet!"

The ride home by moonlight was delightful, the girls sang and the boys laughed and joked and everyone's spirits were away up in "G" as Kate Sutherland mirthfully remarked.

Our business boys were up at Boonville next morning—be very sure of that.

"Here's your thousand dollars, Mr. Snow, and we'll take that wheat option," said Billy as he walked into the office of the elevator.

"Good!" replied the old man; "it's yours; but you'll lose. Wheat dropped three points yesterday, and only came up one at the close."

"Let her drop, we'll take our chances," said Billy, pluckily, and the money was paid over and the papers made out.

"Shall you tell Colonel Spicer?" asked Tom when they found themselves seated in the train.

"Not a word," said Billy. "Just you wait."

But there were two anxious hearts in Blyburne that night. Billy never slept a wink.

Next day he could scarcely wait for the hour to draw nigh.

When the time for the evening train came the boys were down at the station, and jumped for a paper as soon as the bundle was thrown off the baggage car.

Tom waited breathlessly as Billy opened the sheet and glanced at the market reports.

"Hokey!" cried Billy, as his eye ran over the quotations. "By George, wheat's a-jumping! Look, Tom—look! Our holding was worth eight thousand dollars if we could have sold when the Board closed to-night."

Up went Tom's hat, and the loungers about the station were startled to hear him shout:

"Hokey for the Business Boys of Blyburne!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BUSINESS BOYS GO INTO REAL ESTATE.

"What's to be done, Billy?" asked Tom Todd, when the excitement into which he had been thrown by the quotations of the wheat market had in a measure quieted down.

"Sell our wheat, of course," replied Billy, promptly.

"Of course. But how?"

"What's the matter with Col. Spicer?"

"Well, I suppose he's our man. He don't seem to have come on this train, but I have no doubt he'll come on the next."

"Say, I'd hardly like to tackle him here at the station. We'd better go up to the house to-night."

This course was agreed upon.

The boys met at Priest's store about half past seven, and at eight o'clock rang Col. Spicer's bell.

It was the ladies' reception night at the colonel's and the brilliantly-lighted parlors were full of guests.

The colonel came out in a dress suit and looked decidedly bored.

"Well, boys? What did you want to see me for?" he demanded. "I'm very much engaged this evening. If it's about the robbery, I've put a detective on the case, but he hasn't reported yet."

"Isn't that, sir," replied Billy. "It's a little matter of business."

"I don't want to talk business to-night. I try to leave the shop behind me in Chicago. But out with it. I'll have to decide whether it will stand over till to-morrow or not."

"It's a matter of wheat, colonel," said Billy, a little flustered by this short reception.

"Wheat! What about wheat? I've been up to my eyes in wheat all day and have just succeeded in getting it out of my head."

Billy saw plainly that he must rush the point, or be shut off altogether.

"We hold an option on all the wheat in Mr. Snow's elevator at Boonville," he said. "We see by to-night's paper that wheat has gone up, and we want you to sell ours for us to-morrow. That's all."

The Colonel stared.

"What in thunder is all this?" he exclaimed. "I was going to Boonville to buy that wheat first thing to-morrow."

"We bought it this morning, sir."

"You—what do you mean?"

"You told us to hustle, Colonel. We've hustled, and we've got the wheat."

"What did you pay for it? Stay, though. That's none of my business. Where did you get the money to buy it with? That's more to the point."

Billy then told the whole story, omitting only that he had overheard the Colonel's remarks at the station.

"Well, I must say you've shown a good deal of enterprise," said Colonel Spicer. "Still you ran a big risk. But wheat has been on the rise all day, and you are perfectly safe. Very likely to-morrow will see it even better. But I can't talk business any longer. My office in Chicago is the place to see me about this matter. Call there to-morrow at—well, let me see; suppose we say twelve o'clock?"

"But suppose wheat drops in the meantime, sir?"

"It won't."

"But—"

"What! Can't you trust to my judgment? Then you'd better get some other broker. Good-night."

And Colonel Spicer left them abruptly, returning to the parlor.

"Kind of short, wasn't he?" said Tom, when they found themselves in the street.

"I suppose we've got to take him as we find him," replied Billy. "One thing is sure, if we are going to do business, Tom, we mustn't begin by losing our temper at a little thing like this. Of course, we can get another broker if we want one, but we don't. The colonel is good enough for us, and I propose to be at his office at precisely twelve o'clock."

They kept their appointment.

The nine o'clock train took them flying away from Blyburne. The hands on Col. Spicer's big office clock had just come together, when our business boys stepped up to the little hole in the glass partition.

Billy inquired for Col. Spicer, and was ordered to step inside.

The colonel was busy writing at his desk.

He motioned them to be seated, and kept on writing for fully ten minutes before he spoke.

"Now then, boys," he said, laying down his pen, "I am ready for you. Do you want me to sell your wheat?"

Yes, sir," said Billy.

"Are you holding it at any special price, or do you leave it to me to do the best I can?"

"We will leave it to you, sir."

"Then my advice is to sell now, for I think wheat has touched the highest notch on this rise, although also I think there will be another boom before the end of the week."

"Then perhaps we had better hold on."

"No; you had better clean up and take your profit. That will give you a fair start. Where are your papers?"

Billy handed over the document he had received from Mr. Snow.

"This seems to be all straight," said the colonel. "Now I tell you frankly, boys, that I wired Snow this morning and have received an answer corroborating your statements. Don't be offended. Business is business and these things have to be done. I am prepared to take your wheat off your hands at the latest quotation and give you a check at once. You can step up to the ticker and consult the tape and make up your figure."

"Oh, we will trust you for that, sir," said Billy.

"Trust no one in business. Be sure of each move you make."

Billy's eyes opened when he read the latest wheat quotation on the tape.

Wheat had taken a sharp rise since the opening of the board.

"By gracious!" breathed Tom, "we are right in it!"

Instead of being worth \$8,000 their wheat was now worth \$10,000.

They had struck the Chicago wheat market at one of those wild seasons of speculation which have made and unmade many a business man.

"You can take your profit and send Mr. Snow my check for \$4,000 if you wish," said the colonel. "That will settle the whole matter."

"I think I'd rather pay Mr. Snow myself, sir," replied Billy.

"That's right, boys! I just wanted to try you. In business one can't be too particular. Take cash when you can get it. What do you really know of my financial condition? Nothing! I may fail before night!"

Then the colonel wrote a check for \$10,000 to the order of Billy and Tom as business committee of the Blyburne Bicycle Club, and the option was transferred to him.

As Billy suggested that he would like to draw the money, a clerk was sent with them to the bank in order that they might be identified, and the boys found themselves in possession of ten \$1,000 bills.

"By thunder, we've done a big thing," exclaimed Tom when they found themselves alone at last.

"Well, we won't crow about it," replied Billy. "The transaction won't be complete till we've paid old man Snow, and that will be just as soon as we can get to Boonville."

"When's the next train?"

"Three o'clock. Let's go and get lunch, and talk over our next transaction, for I want you to understand, Tom, this is only a starter. The club has given us full power to act, and I propose to turn this five thousand dollars over just as quick as I can."

"But how?"

"We'll have to think. I've got one idea right now."

"What is it?"

"You know the Comet Wheel Company of New York has just opened an office in Chicago, and has been sending us a lot of circulars of late."

"Yes."

"Let's go and see 'em, and find out if they won't offer a purse if we get up a race at Blyburne so as to give their wheel a boom."

"That's a bang-up scheme. Suppose we do it now before we eat?"

To this Billy agreed, and they visited the wheel company's office.

The manager received them pleasantly, and listened to all they had to say.

"I like the plan," he said, after some conversation. "I will consult my principals in New York and let you know. You had better call again in a couple of days."

"That's a good start," said Billy when they were in the street again. "Now for the lunch, and then for Boonville. I shan't feel that we've made a cent until I've paid old Snow."

While they were eating their lunch two men came into the restaurant and took seats on the opposite side of the table.

They immediately began an earnest conversation on the subject of a certain piece of real estate.

"I've got to buy that corner," said one. "You see I own the next lot on both streets, and I am determined to put up a big flat at once."

"Who owns it?" asked his friend.

"I don't know," replied the gentleman. "You see I've just come into the property, and having been absent from Chicago for more than a year I have had no time to look it up."

"How much do you expect you'll have to pay?"

"That I can't say, but I'm willing to go as high as six thousand for the corner. There's a ramshackle old building on it which will have to come down. I don't reckon that as anything. I'll give \$6,000 cash on the nail for the lot."

Then to Tom's surprise Billy suddenly leaned across the table, and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but my name is Sanders. I'd like to ask you if that offer will hold good twenty-four hours?"

"What do you mean? Do you own that lot?" demanded the gentleman.

"No, sir; but I know who does."

"Who?"

"Well, now, you don't expect me to tell you that, do you?" replied Billy, shrewdly.

The gentleman laughed and so did his friend.

"Oh, you are on the make, are you?" he asked.

"I am out for business, sir. If I can get the lot for less, that is my affair."

"Well, that's right, boy, that's right. I've got no time to spend running around in the matter, and I'd probably have to pay a brokerage anyhow. My name is Porter—here's my card."

"But I don't know you, sir. I shall have to ask you for references before I act in the matter. Besides I shall want your promise in writing to take the lot."

"Oh, the deuce you will! You're right up to date, it seems to me. However, business is business. Let me see, I'll refer you to the National Bank of the State of Illinois—how will that do?"

"First rate," replied Billy. "Expect to hear from me within the next twenty-four hours, or not at all."

"All right. Here, I'll write you an agreement to purchase at \$6,000."

Billy arose when the paper was handed over to him, and followed by Tom left the restaurant.

"By gracious, you've got a lot of cheek!" exclaimed the latter as they walked up Dearborn street. "Seems to me you are going ahead pretty fast."

"Not at all," replied Billy, quietly.

"But you don't know who owns that lot."

"Oh, but I do! It belongs to Farmer Irwine and I know that he tried to trade it with my step-father for our meadow; his price was four thousand; if we could scoop it in and sell it for six thousand there'd be nothing the matter with that."

"Well, I should say not!"

"So should I. We're right in business now, Tom, and I propose to hustle for that two thousand dollars profit before I go to bed to-night."

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER ADVENTURE IN DUFFETT'S SWAMP.

"Well, Sanders, have you made any start in that big scheme of yours, for the bicycle club to raise the town debt?" asked Sam Perry, chancing to meet Billy and Tom in Priest's store that evening just after tea.

"Why, yes," replied Billy; "we have made a sort of a start, not much, to be sure, but still a beginning."

"Earned a dollar and a half?" sneered Sam, one of the few club members who had been disposed to throw cold water on Billy's plan.

Then Ned Wilson, Dan Mason, and several of the other young wheelmen burst out laughing.

Mr. Priest and the loungers about the store joined in, and began to chaff the boys about their great business scheme.

"That's all right; just wait till we make our report at the next meeting," said Billy, paying for the articles he had purchased for his stepfather. "I guess we'll be able to make a showing that will surprise you."

"If you don't spend all your profits in peanuts," sneered Mr. Priest.

A sharp reply was on Billy's lips, but he controlled himself and followed Tom who had already left the store.

"Fresh, ain't they?" said Tom, leaping on his wheel.

"Never mind," said Billy; "we'll show 'em! Just wait, old man! Wouldn't they have opened their eyes if they had known that we paid old Snow four thousand in cash this afternoon and have five thousand left."

But the officers of the club knew—Billy had already reported to them.

Still in a highly elated state of mind over their success, our business boys, after leaving Billy's packages at Mr. Hodges' house, rode out to Farmer Irwine's.

Nothing had been seen of Ike nor of Florence since the night of the fire, but the old miser himself had been twice into the town.

The boys rode their wheels up to the front stoop and leaning them against the piazza went up and pulled the bell.

There was no answer until they rang three times.

Then a light was seen descending the stairs, and the farmer's harsh voice called out to know who was there!

"It's only me, Mr. Irwine. Billy Sanders! I want to speak to you a minute!" Billy called out.

"Go'way!" cried the miser. "Go'way! We don't want you bicycle fellers 'round here. Go way!"

"But I want to see you on important business."

"Hain't got no time to talk bizness. Got all I can do to tend to my crops."

"The old idiot expects we are up to some dodge," breathed Tom. "In my way of thinking, we ain't heard the last of that swamp business yet."

"I'll fetch him out," chuckled Billy. "I'll let him smell a dollar—then see him open the door."

"Say, Mr. Irwine, you'll miss a good thing if you don't listen to me!" he shouted. "I've got you a customer for that Chicago lot of yours."

"Eh? What?" cried the farmer, on the alert at once, for this happened to be a period of great depression in the Chicago real estate market, when it was next to impossible to sell for cash.

Farmer Irwine let down the heavy bars which secured his door in a hurry, but he did not invite the boys inside.

Instead of that, he stepped out on the piazza, carefully closing the door behind him.

"Well, Billy—well, my son?" he asked, with a hideous leer, meant for a friendly smile. "Has Mr. Hodges concluded to take up with my offer and trade the medder? It's a splendid chance for him; he can't lose nothing in it nohow."

"No, it ain't my step-father," replied Billy, "it's another party altogether. What will you take for the lot cash down?"

"Who's your man, Billy?"

"Well, now, Farmer, if I was to tell you then you'd know as much as I do and where would I come in?"

"But how do I know you hain't afoolin' of me. Boys like you don't make real estate deals."

"That's all right now. Name your price and if it suits the money is ready."

"It's worth five thousand dollars if it's worth a cent!"

"That's nonsense! You offered it in trade to Mr. Hodges for \$4,000. I'll give you \$3,000 cash!"

"No, no! Couldn't think of it. Cost me more money!"

"Why, I understood you took it for a debt and it didn't stand you in but \$2,000."

"That hain't so. Come, I'll say \$4,000, seein' it's you. I 'spose this is part of your plan to help out the town, and I don't want to be mean."

"It is part of our plan. Thirty-five hundred dollars, Farmer."

"No, sir, not a penny less than \$4,000."

There was more haggling, but Farmer Irwine would not come down.

"Very well," said Billy, "you meet me at Lawyer Tibbetts' office to-morrow morning at eight o'clock, prepared to transfer the deed, and the money will be there. I 'spose you'll give me a writing?"

"Not a line."

"But suppose you change your mind?"

"Then I'll change it—that's all. But a bargain is a bargain, and I'll be there."

Thus saying, Farmer Irwine went inside and slammed the door.

"By Jove, you got him, Billy," said Tom, admiringly.

"Yes, if he don't back out. Come, let's be off."

They mounted their wheels, but did not go far, for just as they reached the end of the low fence enclosing the farmer's grounds, Florence Irwine suddenly stepped out from the shadows.

"Billy! Is that you?" she called, in a low voice.

The boys pulled up instantly.

"Florence!" breathed Billy.

"Yes, yes! Oh, Billy, I am in such trouble—such deep trouble."

"What is it, Florence? If there's any way in the world I can help you——"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. There's been a detective watching our house all day. He may be near here now."

Billy winced.

He felt in his heart that he was responsible for that.

"Is it about Ike, Florence?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes; Billy, they are talking about my poor brother; they are saying that he robbed the safe down at the town hall. It's a lie! It's a base lie, and you alone can help me prove it."

"I should be so happy if I could, Florence."

"You can. What did you come here for to-night?"

"To see your father about a real estate matter."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else—I swear it!"

"You needn't. Your word is enough. Billy, will you follow me?"

"Anywhere, Florence. Can Tom go too?"

Florence looked doubtful.

"He'll keep my secret in case we fail?"

"I certainly will," said Tom. "You ought to be willing to trust me, Florence. I have always been your friend."

"I don't know who my friends are these days," said the girl bitterly, "but come! We are losing time—every moment is precious. Did my father go inside?"

"Yes, and barred the door."

"If he will only stay there—but there's no telling. Billy, you know the path by which you went into Duffett's swamp the other evening?"

"Yes."

"Go there. Hide your wheels and wait for me."

It was but a moment's ride to the entrance to the path.

Florence soon joined them.

The boys had already stowed their wheels away among the bushes and were all ready.

"Follow me," said Florence, "and as you value your life and mine don't you speak a word."

She hurried on ahead of them, gliding along among the bushes with great rapidity.

In fact it was all the boys could do to keep up with her until they reached the pond.

Here she paused and listened.

"Do you hear anything, Billy?" she whispered.

"Not a sound."

"Are you armed?"

"Why, no; we've each of us got our jack-knives, but that's all."

"You are not afraid—not afraid to run some risk?"

"Not in your service, Florence."

"Then come! This way—it is only a step now."

She plunged into the thicket and the boys followed her to the spot where the underbrush had been cleared away for the space of a few yards.

"Do you see that?" whispered Florence, pointing to a flat, heavy stone which lay imbedded in the ground—a strange object here in Illinois.

"That stone—yes! How in the world did it get here?"

"Don't question me. Raise it if you can."

Billy bent down to grasp the stone.

At the same instant the sharp crack of a rifle was heard just behind them and a bullet came whizzing past their heads.

"Too late!" gasped the girl. "Run! Run! Run for your lives!"

Again the rifle cracked and someone was heard crashing through the bushes.

It was clearly no time to question or investigate.

Feeling that he was at Florence's command and the only way was to do just as she said, Billy went dashing after the frightened girl back to the pond, Tom close behind them.

"Back to the road!" breathed Florence. "We can do nothing here! Billy, I'll see you later and explain."

She flew before them like the wind.

Although the sounds behind them had now ceased Billy and Tom lost no time in following her.

But she had gone when they reached the road, so there was nothing for them to do but to mount their wheels and ride back to town in a state of tremendous perplexity over the strange affair.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT RACE AT BLYBURNE.

"Colonel, what do you think of it? We don't want to take this step unless you approve."

"Think of it! I think very well of it. Upon my word you boys will keep me busy. I don't know as I shall have time to stop at Tibbetts' office and make my train."

"I'm sorry to bother you at your house again," said Billy, "but we did want your advice."

"That's all right, boys. It's a clear case of necessity, brought about by hustling," replied the colonel, who had been called away from the breakfast table by the early visit of Billy and Tom.

"But why is it necessary for you to go to Lawyer Tibbetts' office?" asked Billy. "We only want your advice."

"Who's to take title to the lot—you, a minor?"

"I never thought of that."

"Of course you didn't. You've lots to learn yet. This property must either be transferred to Mr. Porter, who I know very well, and who is perfectly reliable——"

"We know that, sir. We inquired at the bank of Illinois."

"Or to a third party," continued the colonel. "That is the only way to do. I am willing to act as the intermediary if you will trust me."

"Certainly we will," replied Billy. "We shall only be too glad."

A curious look came on the colonel's face.

"I'll attend to it," he said. "Now let me thank you for the great service you did my daughter the other night. I only knew of it yesterday evening, or I should have spoken before."

"It was nothing," said Billy, lightly.

"It was a great deal, my boy, and I shan't forget it. By the way, I heard Clara talking about a proposed bicycle race here in Blyburne. Is this more of your getting up?"

"Yes, sir," replied Billy, and he told of his call on the Comet Wheel Co.

"Well, you boys are hustling, for a fact," said the colonel. "But you must let me in on this. I'll put up a purse of \$2,000 on the handicap, to be presented by the winner to the town, so that no matter who takes the race, your funds will be increased just so much."

This was good news.

The boys were full of the proposed race as they rode back to Main street on their wheels.

"By thunder, you're carrying everything before you, Billy," said Tom, "and I'm glad of it."

"I know you are, old man, but why don't you get up some scheme yourself?"

"Oh, I'm no schemer. The only thing I grudge you is about Susie Spicer. If it had only been me who had saved her from those tramps."

"Oh, that's the way the cat jumps, is it?" laughed Billy. "I've long suspected you were sweet in that quarter. But never mind. Your time will come."

It was destined to come sooner than either of the boys imagined.

They did not know that Susie was then out on her wheel for an early morning spin, until they came nearly opposite Priest's store, and saw the colonel's daughter with Kate Sutherland and several others, riding their wheels toward them.

The boys dismounted here, and stood to see them go by.

Just then who should come out of Bissell's hardware store but Farmer Irwine, carrying a new ax in his hand.

He was heading across the street, but when he was a little more than half way over, seemed to suddenly remember something and started back.

It was a most unfortunate moment, for the girls had just come up, Susie in the lead.

Of course, she supposed that the old man would keep right on and nobody who saw the occurrence could blame her when her wheel struck the miser and sent him sprawling in the road.

The wheel was overturned by the shock and Susie fell, too.

"Your chance, Tom," breathed Billy, holding back.

Tom had already made a dash to the reserve when Farmer Irwine scrambled up unhurt, sputtering fiercely against the bicycles and bicycle riders.

"I'll larn ye all!" he cried, raising his ax for a blow at Susie's fallen wheel. "I'll larn ye to run people down!"

And he would have smashed it to a certainty if Tom had not seized his arm and wrenched the ax away.

A crowd gathered in a moment.

There was some pretty tall talking, but when the miser found that every one was against him he slunk away.

"Oh, Mr. Todd, I'm so much obliged to you for saving my wheel," said Susie. "It was so kind, so brave of you that——"

She paused and blushed.

Perhaps she thought she had said too much, but Tom blushed too as he stammered a reply and raised his hat.

The girl mounted and rode away, and Tom rejoined Billy as the crowd began to disperse.

"You've done it now, Tom," said Billy. "You're right in it, old man."

"Yes, I'm afraid I've done it in more ways than one," replied Tom. "Old Irwine will never show up at Tibbeett's office now. He'll back out as sure as fate."

But they did not know their man.

Farmer Irwine wanted to sell his lot, consequently he was at the lawyer's office on time, and never made the slightest allusion to what had occurred.

Colonel Spicer was there, too, and the matter was finally arranged, although the miser accused the colonel of wanting the property for himself and tried to raise his price.

But Billy was firm, and the farmer finally yielding, the money was paid over and the deed signed in time for the train.

This meant another trip to Chicago, and the business boys went in on the colonel's train, who took them direct to his lawyer and executed a deed of the lot in blank to be delivered to Mr. Porter in payment of the cash.

At eleven o'clock Billy and Tom walked into Mr. Porter's office.

The real estate speculator seemed rather surprised to see them, but he took the lot at once and paid over the cash.

By half-past three the boys were back in Blyburne \$2,000 richer by the little deal.

There was nothing done next day, nor the next following.

But on Saturday Billy received a note from the agent of the Comet Wheel Company announcing that the company would put up a purse of \$1,000 for a scratch race providing the club would ride Comet wheels exclusively.

A meeting was held and the proposition accepted, the colonel's liberal offer lending enthusiasm to the affair.

After some deliberation the race was set down for the Saturday of the following week.

In the interim no business was entered into by Billy and Tom, nor did they see or hear anything from Florence.

Saturday dawned clear and cool.

The day could not have been better for the race if it had been made to order.

Everybody was on hand at an early hour.

Of course all Blyburne was there, and the Liberty club and half the townspeople.

The Bloomington club came too and so did the Waukegans.

Colonel Spicer remained home and occupied a place on the judges' stand.

Precisely at half-past one the signal for the start of the handicap was given.

Billy and Tom resolved to stay out of that, and the prize was won by Jim Whitman of the Bloomingtons, who, with a neat little speech, presented the purse to the town of Blyburne.

Wild cheers followed, and Colonel Spicer came in for a round. Then came the mile dash, which was won by Billy.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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GOOD STORIES.

Pecan-nut farming is one of the most profitable industries of the Gulf states. After the trees have once begun to bear they involve no labor or expense, and yield an income of from five hundred to one thousand dollars an acre, according to the quality of the nuts.

Clocks without hands or faces are now common in Switzerland. Your timepiece merely stands in the hall, and you press a button, when, by means of the phonographic internal arrangements, it calls out "Half-past five," or "Five minutes to nine," as the case may be.

It is not generally known that hens are fond of music, and become industrious under the influence of strains of melody. Mrs. James Creamer, of Springfield, Ohio, has repeatedly proved this assertion, and now daily plays her piano with the parlor windows open, so that the music can be distinctly heard in the hen-house.

In France, where the school-savings-bank system has been in operation since 1824, there are more than \$3,000,000 of children's savings in the banks. Germany has had the system since 1846. The children of Lowell, Mass., have placed more than \$10,000 in the banks in the last few years. A Pittsburg bank has more than 26,000 children depositors, with \$150,000 on deposit.

The old question as to whether the upper part of a carriage-wheel in motion goes faster than the lower part seems to have been convincingly settled by instantaneous photography. In the photograph the outer ends of the upper spokes appear indistinct by reason of the motion, while the outer ends of the spokes in the lower part of the wheel are photographed with comparative distinctness.

A recent estimate of the amount of energy derived from Niagara Falls places it at 273,140 horse-power, divided in its application as follows: Electro-chemical industries, 126,000; railway service, 56,200; lighting, 36,400; various industrial purposes, 54,540. The total energy of the falls is estimated at 5,000,000 horse-power, so that not much more than 5 per cent. is at present utilized.

Harry Burns, of Rochester, N. Y., likes eggs, but he likes them fresh. He lately bought a dozen of the hen fruit at a grocery in that city, and the grocer assured him that the eggs were laid two days before. Burns examined his eggs and found his name and address written on one of them. While he was an employee of a cold-storage plant, four years ago, he had written his name and address on the egg.

Killing sables in Russia in entire disregard of future supplies has resulted in a steady decline in the catch, and in some districts has nearly effected the extermination of these valuable fur bearers; the matter has been taken up by the authorities, and no sables will be permitted to be caught during the present season, and the matter of making an absolutely closed period of three years is to be considered without delay.

In the mountains in the western part of Brewster County, Texas, Paul Larkins and Frank Hillings, two boys, while hunting, accidentally came across an abandoned silver mine, which it is believed contains fabulous wealth. Legend has it that the Indians worked a silver mine in that section three-quarters of a century ago. Silver taken from the mine three weeks ago, for they guarded their secret in their families, is remarkably pure, with more traces of cinnabar. The youthful huntsmen began digging after the discovery with such crude tools as their camp afforded and sunk a shaft. They found a lead about fifteen feet wide which extended directly back into a large mountain. Ancient mining instruments consisting of sharpened flints attached to birch wood handles, were found. The mouth of the shaft has been closed with logs and brush, and large trees of many years' growth stood in front of the opening. Numerous layers of veins of silver several hundred feet in length, and from an eighth of an inch to an inch in thickness, give some idea of the richness and quantity of the ore. Samples taken from different points in the mine were sent to El Paso and Chicago, and they assayed high. The mine is in an isolated section of the mountains and the father of the boys has filed papers defining their claims. A company will be organized to work the mine with modern machinery.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Old gentleman (to convict)—What is the most objectionable feature you find in prison life, friend? Convict—Visitors.

"There's a man outside who wants to see you." "What sort of man?" "He's a blind man." "Tell him he can't see me."

"You women think too much of your clothes," said Mr. Tyte, severely. Mrs. Tyte looked down, parted her skirt and smiled a demure and yet ironical smile. "I don't think much of these," she murmured.

Small Girl—Why doesn't baby talk, father? Father—He can't talk yet, dear. Young babies never do. Small Girl—Oh, yes, they do. Job did. Nurse read to me out of the Bib? how Job cursed the day he was born!

"Bertie," said the hospital hostess at a Sunday school treat, "won't you eat some more cookies?" "I can't. I'm full!" sighed Bertie. "Well, then, put some in your pockets." "I can't. They're full, too," was the regretful answer.

This is a quotation from a Connecticut woman's diary, dated 1790: "We had roast pork for dinner, and Doctor S., who carved, held up a rib on his fork and said: Here, ladies, is what Mother Eve was made of." "Yes," said Sister Patty, "and it's from very much the same kind of critter."

In the midst of a wintry wood a traveler in a sledge fled before a pack of famished wolves. As soon as he could feel their hot breath on his cheek he muttered: "It's time!" drew his sword, struck off his left arm, and threw it to the howling, hungry beasts. But only to gain thereby a temporary respite. In a few moments they were upon him once more, whereat he drew his sword a second time, struck off his right arm, and threw that out likewise.

Nellie—That Clara De Note is just the meanest, most utterly selfish girl I ever saw. She never thinks of any one but herself. Dora—Do tell! Nellie—Yes. I ran in there the other evening for a few moments, and while I was there Mr. Nice-fello called. Well, it wasn't long before he requested her to play. He's passionately fond of music, you know. Well, what do you think that girl did? She asked him to come to the piano and turn the music for her, just so I couldn't talk to him.

Some boys were annoying an old gentleman by snow-balling his horse. After patience had ceased to be a virtue, the old gentleman ran out in the street to punish the boys. The guilty lads escaped, but the old gentleman caught a little fellow, who had been a spectator, and began to flog him; but, to the man's surprise, the harder the boy was whipped the more he laughed. "Why, look here," said the old gentleman, "what's the matter?" "Well," said the boy, "I'm laughing because you are awfully sold. I ain't the boy!"

AN UNDETECTED DETECTIVE

By D. W. Stevens.

One foggy afternoon, in the month of February, in the year 1875, a handsomely appointed coupe, driven by a faultlessly-liveried driver, threaded its way through the busy throng of carriages, cabs, carts and vehicles of all descriptions in crowded Regent street, and stopped before the wide doors of Messrs. Storr & Mortimer, the great London jewelers.

The coupe had scarcely come to a standstill before two elegantly-dressed young men sprang to the sidewalk, and passed into the fashionable jewelry shop.

One of the young men was tall, broad-shouldered, with a rather florid complexion, and heavy blonde mustache; the other was of medium height, of slight but wide build, with piercing black eyes, and long black mustache, while his face was marked with a scar running down from his left temple to his cheek bone. This scar bore the appearance of a sword-cut, possibly the relic of some body-contested duel, and this presumption gained greater force from the fact that, although his clothes bore the impress of a London artist, his manners and appearance suggested the foreigner.

Entering the large store, they walked towards the desk of Mr. Charles Littleton, the head salesman of the establishment, and asked to see some specimens of plate.

Several of the choicest specimens were shown to the two customers, and both showed the intelligent appreciation of a refined and cultured taste in discussing the merits of the samples of silverware set before them.

By an easy and seemingly natural gradation the conversation glided to other branches of the silversmith's and jeweler's art, and finally reached the discussion of precious stones.

"After all, the world is right in prizing the diamond most highly. Other stones undoubtedly have their beauties, but they all pale before the magnificent luster and brilliancy of the diamond," said the one whose face betokened a foreign origin.

"You are right, count, and here are some stones which are well worthy your praise," said his companion as he leaned over the diamond case, toward which they had carelessly strolled while talking.

Littleton placed some of the choicest sets on the case, and while maintaining the quiet reserve and seemingly unobservant manner of the experienced salesman in a fashionable jewelry shop, permitted not a movement of either of the two gentlemen to escape him.

For how often in that very shop had an elegantly dressed and aristocratic-looking customer absent-mindedly slipped a valuable diamond ring into the palm of his faultlessly gloved hand; and had not even fascinating widows and modest-looking maidens been caught in the act of concealing valuables in their muffs, or the folds of their shawls? But such impostors were almost invariably detected by the lynx eyes of those suave, gentlemanly, apparently listless salesmen and the offender was politely bowed out of the store into the arms of a private detective who was ever waiting in readiness for such emergencies.

More elaborately planned robberies were also familiar to their experience.

There was Bradley, for instance, who stood two counters off. He had been sent to show a sedate-looking matron and her invalid husband a set of diamonds—in that case the invalid husband had suddenly developed wonderful muscular strength, and had succeeded in overpowering the unfortunate salesman, while the sedate-looking matron had added the robbery of his senses to that of the diamonds, through the agency of chloroform.

There was Bishop, who was found on the floor of a private parlor in a fashionable hotel with a broken arm and fractured skull. Some of the fellow-clerks maliciously insinuated that poor Bishop had never entirely recovered from his cracked skull; but, however that might be, certain it was that Messrs. Storr & Mortimer had never recovered the three thousand pounds' worth of pearls and rubies with which Mr. Bishop had been entrusted for the inspection of the supposed customers.

Then, again, there was Morrison, who had been so greatly fooled by a charming young lady, who represented herself to be the wife of a leading physician, and to whose alleged residence he had been sent with a diamond necklace worth a small fortune. Poor Morrison had been sent into the parlor by a charming creature, relieved of his precious burden, and

politely requested to step into her husband's study, where he would obtain the amount of his bill. After a very curious interview, in which there seemed much apprehension on either side, the alarmed young salesman discovered to his horror that her husband was a dangerous lunatic and was chased out. The lady in question was not the doctor's wife. She had merely called the day before upon the physician, who was the head of a highly select and private madhouse, and made arrangements for the reception of "her poor brother, who was so rational in every way except upon the subject of diamonds." The more poor Morrison stormed and raved the more he was begged not to excite himself. Even manifold assurance that everything would be done to make him happy and comfortable in his new home, and that he would be speedily cured, failed to calm him, and recourse was finally had to the quieting influence of a straight jacket. In this condition he was found on the following day by the detectives employed by Storr & Mortimer to hunt up their missing salesman. They were not so successful in finding the lady or the diamonds.

In fact, there were few men occupying the more important positions in the store who had not, at some time or other, been taught the virtue of caution at the expense of their employers.

So far Littleton had been the most unfortunate, and was, consequently, full of pride and self-confidence in his shrewdness. He was suspicious, however, very suspicious, and, while treating all with bland courtesy, looked upon every stranger as at least a possible swindler, who had come to purloin some of the precious articles entrusted to his care.

Meanwhile the two gentlemen continued their examination of the contents of the case, and finally selected a necklace, two rings, a bracelet studded with diamonds, and some other valuable trinkets. The articles selected were all among the most expensive, and proved that the purchasers possessed both good taste and considerable knowledge of the wares they were examining. In all, their purchases amounted to the sum of three thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds.

"To what address can I have the pleasure of sending these articles?" asked Littleton, in his blandest voice.

"We will take them with us in the coupe," replied the foreign-looking gentleman, quietly. "How shall I liquidate my debt? Will you accept my check on Coutts?"

A well-simulated expression of regret appeared on the well-trained countenance of Mr. Littleton. It was against the rule of the firm to accept checks from any but customers who were perfectly satisfied, and was filled with profound regret that the rules forbade him receiving a check in payment, but he dare not transgress them.

While Mr. Littleton ran on in his softest tones and blandest manner, he chuckled inwardly, and thought to himself that if his customers chanced to be "crooked," he was not to be caught by any game they could invent.

They, however, received his excuses without manifesting the least annoyance.

"I am afraid," continued his interlocutor, "that you will have to send them to me, then—unless I happen to have more money about me than I had supposed."

And he drew from his inside breast coat pocket a Russian leather portmonnaie, from which he drew a number of banknotes, which he proceeded to count.

"Just two hundred and fifty short!" he exclaimed, after counting them over. "Have you two hundred and fifty you can let me have, Carrington?" he said, turning to his companion.

"Certainly, my dear count," replied the other, as he drew some banknotes from the pocketbook, out of which he had just paid for his own purchase of plate.

"Oh, then, all is satisfactory," murmured the count, with a little weary sigh and a gracious smile, as he pushed the notes over the showcase to the salesman.

Littleton examined them carefully. They were Bank of England notes, fresh, crisp, and as good as the gold they represented.

The purchases of the two gentlemen were neatly and carefully packed up, and after they had been conveyed to their coupe, the count and his companion drove off, after wishing Mr. Littleton a very good-day.

"Nice-looking, pleasant gentlemen, good customers, and I've made a good sale," was Mr. Littleton's comment, as he rearranged the showcase after the departure of his customers.

Fifteen minutes had hardly gone by when a cab suddenly rattled up to the door, and two men sprang out and hurriedly entered the store. They particularly attracted the attention of Mr. Littleton by their quick, eager movements, and also by their dress, which did not possess the fashionable cut and

quiet elegance usually characterizing that of the customers of Storr & Mortimer.

The taller man of the two was protected from the raw air of the foggy February afternoon by a long mantle, buttoned closely to the chin; while his companion, a man noticeable chiefly for a pair of piercing gray eyes, was dressed in a suit of rough tweed.

The tall man in the long mantle stepped up to one of the salesmen and whispered to him in a low tone, while the other followed at his side, casting, in the meanwhile, quick, searching glances around him. A moment later the two men, acting, apparently, in accordance with the directions received from the clerk, to whom they had addressed themselves, walked quickly towards Littleton.

"Have two men been here to-day, the one tall and with a light mustache, the other small, dark, with a scar running down from his temple to his cheek bone?" asked he of the mantle, in quick, imperious tones.

Littleton started. The description exactly tallied with the appearance of his two customers who had so lately taken their leave.

"Yes; two gentlemen answering to your description were here a short while ago," answered Littleton, after a moment's hesitation.

"Did they purchase anything?" asked the tall man, eagerly.

"Yes, but——"

"Did they pay for it?" was asked, in the same eager tone.

"Of course they did," replied Littleton, with a shade of indignation in his voice, as if insulted at the suspicion that he was one who would be likely to sell goods without securing the money for them.

"How long have they left? How much did they buy? Where is the money?" asked the man, in the same brief, imperious tone.

"What do you mean? By what right do you ask these questions?" exclaimed Littleton, who began to be filled with a vague uneasiness.

"In the name of the law," sharply answered the tall man, throwing back his long cloak, and disclosing to the astonished eyes of the salesman the uniform of an inspector of police. "We are after a couple of adroit swindlers, by whom we have reason to suppose that you, among others, have been victimized. To what amount did they purchase?"

"To the amount of three thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds," gasped Littleton, with his heart in his mouth.

"Show us at once the money with which they paid you," commanded the inspector.

For a moment a reassuring feeling returned to Littleton. He had closely scrutinized the Bank of England notes he had received, and he could not but feel convinced that they were genuine.

He hastily drew the money from the drawer and handed it over to the inspector.

The latter examined the notes carefully for a moment, and then turned to the man in the tweed suit who accompanied him.

"Just as we suspected, Simmonds," he said. "These notes are even a more perfect counterfeit than the others we have come across."

"Yes, sir," answered the man in the tweed suit. "These 'ere notes can't be detected from the genuine ones except from that little mistake in the water-mark."

"Just so, Simmonds," replied the inspector. "How long ago did these men leave?" he asked, turning to the pale and terrified salesman.

"About fifteen minutes before you entered," replied Littleton, in trembling tones.

"How did they leave?"

"They left in a coupe, taking the plate and diamonds they had purchased with them."

"Too long a start to follow them just yet, eh, Simmonds?"

"Too long a start, sir," echoed the subordinate.

"Young man, we take possession of these counterfeit notes on the Bank of England in the name of the law," said the inspector, fiercely, turning to Littleton.

"But," objected the salesman, "I would like to see one of the firm first, to consult Mr. Mortimer."

"Where 'can he be seen?"

"He is not in just at present, but shortly——"

"We have no time to waste in waiting," broke in the inspector, curtly. "We are going direct to Scotland Yard; if you so desire, you can accompany us and a receipt will be given you for these notes. Only, if you are coming, be quick about it."

Littleton decided to accompany them, and followed them to their cab in no enviable state of mind.

Two days later the papers were full of the great robbery at Storr & Mortimer's. Poor Littleton had been found by a policeman in a state of utter insensibility in one of the remote suburbs of London. The officer, with that fine discrimination which ever distinguishes the force, at once took him into custody, and the handsome, well-dressed, bland Mr. Littleton was detained all night in a crowded cell on the charge of being drunk and incapable. He was, however, too much occupied in sleeping off the effects of the powerful drug that had been forcibly administered to him in the cab by the soi-distant detectives to pay much heed to his surroundings.

Fortunately, when he was arraigned before the magistrate the next morning he had just sufficiently recovered his senses to be somewhat lucid and to induce the magistrate to inquire into the story related to him. Then all the facts of the case were brought to light.

Mr. Littleton, we are sorry to say, does not enjoy the same confidence from the firm that he once possessed, and Scotland Yard has not as yet been visited by the two detectives bearing with them three thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds in counterfeit Bank of England notes; nor has the secret police as yet been able to find any trace of the "count" or his gentlemanly companion.

COAXING SARAH.

Justice Alley had hardly been opened to legal business yesterday morning when a sleigh containing seven or eight persons from beyond the city limits drove up to the door of a popular justice and the inmates piled out with an air of business. His Honor was poking up the fire, when an old man beckoned him into a corner, and whispered:

"Got a job of splicing here for ye. My darter Sarah here is going to hitch to that chap there with the blue comforter, and then we're going out to have some oysters."

"All right—all right," was the reply, and in two minutes the official was all ready.

The man with the blue comforter peeled off his overcoat, laid aside his hat, and extended his hand to Sarah.

"I won't do it—I'll die first!" she said, as she shrank away.

"She's a leetle timid—a leetle timid," explained the old man, while the mother rebukingly observed:

"Sarah, don't you make a fool of yourself here. William will make you a good husband."

"And don't you forget it!" added William. "Come, Sarah."

"I won't unless we can go to New York on a bridal tower!" she snapped.

The old man beckoned William and Sarah aside and began:

"Now, Sarah, William jist dotes on you."

"But I want a bridal tower."

"Yes; but ye can't have one. The railroads are all snowed under, and towers have gone out of fashion, anyhow."

"Then, I want a diamond ring."

"Now don't say that, Sarah, fur I went to every store last Saturday, and they was all out of diamond rings."

"Then, I want a set of mink furs."

"Mink furs! William, I know you'd buy 'em for her in a second, but they've gone out of style, and can't be had. Sarah, I'm yer father, hain't I?"

"Yes, dad."

"And I've allus bin tender of ye?"

"Yes."

"Then be tender of me. I want to see ye married to William. You can't have a tower, nor a diamond ring, nor a set of furs, but I'll buy ye a pair of new gaiters. William will pay fur the oysters, and I'll see that mother divides up the dishes and bedding with ye. Sarah, do you want to see my gray hairs bowed down?"

"No-o-o."

"Then don't flunk out."

"Will they be two-dollar gaiters?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And all the oysters we can eat?"

"Yes, all you kin stuff."

"And a tower next fall, if wheat does well?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess I will. Come, Bill, I don't keer two cents for you, but I want to oblige father."

SHOT IN THE EYE

By Horace Appleton

Carroll Banvard's death was a most mysterious one, and for a long time the case puzzled the detectives, and even the most astute of them could not explain it satisfactorily.

He was found dead one evening, lying upon the floor under the open window of his study, which looked out upon the street.

A half-burned cigar thrown upon the carpet indicated that he had been smoking that evening.

He could not have fallen in a fit, for he was not subject to them, and this theory was abandoned as having no foundation in fact.

It was hinted that the cigar might have been poisoned, and have caused his sudden death.

Upon being taken to a chemist, it was pronounced to be perfectly harmless, containing nothing but the purest tobacco, and as there was a box of the same kind upon one of the shelves of the study, the cigar could not have been given to Mr. Banvard, and therefore the poison theory was exploded as well as the one of the fit.

The question then arose, how did Carroll Banvard come to his death?

A very little blood had been discovered, but at first it was thought to have flowed from a bruise that he seemed to have on the back of his head around toward the left side.

Upon examining the body more closely, however, considerable blood was found about the right eye, which led to an investigation.

It was then discovered that some object, probably a bullet, had passed through the eye, and had emerged at the back of the head.

The man had been killed by a shot in the eye.

But who had fired the shot?

That was the question of most importance.

Nobody had heard the report of firearms that evening, either in the house or in the street.

It is true that there were very few persons in the street at that time, it being a retired locality, but the absence of other noises would have rendered the hearing of a gun or pistol-shot more easy.

No one in the house or the adjoining houses had heard the report, and had not even supposed there had been a gun fired until the wound was found.

Was it a gun or a pistol?

The wound in the back of the head seemed to indicate that the bullet was large, but that was nothing.

It may have been of a kind that would tear about and make a large hole, or the hole itself might have been enlarged by the fall.

The bullet itself must be found.

A surgeon probed for it, but could not find it after a long search, and so the mystery deepened.

At last it was found, and in a peculiar fashion, by one of the detectives.

Wherever there is a mystery, it is customary to employ a detective, and if he doesn't find scent, as if by instinct, of every single twist and turn of the case, then he is at once set down as a base pretender.

The detective in this case first set about finding the missing bullet, so that he might tell whether it had been shot from a gun or pistol.

After that had been determined, he would proceed to work up his clew, and trace out the person or persons who had shot Carroll Banvard.

This detective, whom we will call Dodge for convenience, searched carefully for the bullet in the room where Carroll had been sitting at the time he was shot.

He had no idea that the bullet was still in the man's head, and before long he found it, wedged in between two volumes in the book-case.

The glass doors were closed, but they had been open on that fatal evening, and the glass was, of course, uninjured, this fact serving to distract the detective's attention from the book-case while prosecuting his search.

Singular as was the finding of the bullet itself, there was something still more curious.

Its shape and size were odd, and unlike any ordinary projectile used in fire-arms.

Dodge examined it for some time, and was unable to make anything of it.

Then he took it to a dealer in fire-arms.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The bullet of an air-gun."

That was why there had been no report—no noise—and why, when Carroll Banvard had been struck down by the secret hand of the assassin, no tell-tale report, smoke or smell of powder had given intimation of the crime.

"Shot with an air-gun," mused Dodge; "that narrows the thing down close; for it's not everybody that has such a weapon."

The means had been discovered, now for the motive and the actor.

Carroll Banvard was not known to have any enemies; none so bad as to want to kill him, and Dodge felt as if the hardest part of his work was to come.

In making his inquiries, he ran across a man that lived in an adjacent street, and the back windows of whose house commanded a view of the house and street in which the murdered man had lived.

This man told him that, now the matter was being agitated, he remembered a rather curious circumstance that had gone out of his memory, and only was recalled by Dodge's visit.

"I was looking out of my window that night," he said, "when by the light of the street-lamp I saw a man standing at the foot of the steps of the large mansion nearly opposite Mr. Carroll Banvard's residence."

"What was he doing?"

The large pillar at one side partly hid him from my view, but I could see his hat and part of his cloak."

"Had he anything in his hand?"

"Yes; but what I could not exactly make out. There was something upon his shoulder."

"How did he stand?"

"Come to the window."

Dodge went to the window with the man, and the latter continued:

"You see the end pillar?"

"Yes."

"Well, between that and the next stood this man, wearing a round-topped hat and a cloak. He was leaning slightly forward, and I could not see his face. He held something to his shoulder for a little while, and then suddenly dropped it and went away."

"Did you hear any noise?"

"No, not a sound."

"Could you see Mr. Banvard's window?"

"I noticed a light there."

"Did you notice anything unusual while you were looking?"

"No; but after the man had gone I happened to look that way, and saw that there was no one sitting by the window."

"Did you draw any conclusions?"

"No; only that Mr. Banvard had gone away."

"Did you think of this strange man when you heard that Mr. Banvard had been shot?"

"No; not until you came."

"What do you think now?"

"That the man shot Mr. Banvard with a gun."

"But you heard no noise?"

"No."

"Might he not have had an air-gun?"

"By Jove! he might. I never thought of that!"

"Do you know any one who owns such a weapon?"

"No."

"Do you think the man went into the large house after the shooting?"

"I cannot tell."

"Who lives there?"

"No one at present; the owner is in Europe."

"Had he ever had any quarrel with Mr. Carroll Banvard?"

"There was one, I believe, long ago, but I thought it had been settled."

"Who owns the large house?"

"A Mr. Carleton."

"You are sure he is still in Europe?"

"Quite sure."

That was all that could be elicited, and Dodge felt that he was not much nearer the solution of the mystery than before.

He determined to follow up the slight clew he had obtained, and see if he could not discover who the mysterious man was who had been standing at the steps of the Carleton mansion that evening.

"You have not seen him since?"

"No."

Dodge tried to discover if any one lived in the house, or if Mr. Carleton had returned, but could obtain no satisfactory information upon either point.

"That is good," he muttered. "If I had learned positively that no one lived in the house, and that Mr. Carleton was still away, I should have had to give up that idea."

Two or three days afterward he received a strange note from the man he had interviewed.

It ran thus:

"He was there last night."

In the evening he went to the man's house, and the two kept watch at the window.

For hours they waited in vain for the mysterious being to appear.

At last they saw him standing between the two pillars, holding something in his hand.

In a few moments he disappeared.

"Strange," muttered Dodge—"very strange. We will watch for him again to-morrow."

They did so, Dodge providing himself with a powerful field-glass.

The man appeared at the same hour, remained a few moments, and then disappeared.

Dodge could not see his face, but did see that he held a gun to his shoulder.

"I have a plan," he said; "and if you will come with me to-morrow night, I will show you something."

"Agreed."

At the appointed time, Dodge and his companion were hiding behind one of the pillars of the Carleton house.

At about midnight the front door opened slowly, a man peered out, and presently walked cautiously down the steps.

He had a small gun in his hand.

He stood against the railing, between the first two pillars, and looked over toward the window where Carroll Banvard had been sitting on the night of the murder.

He stood there a moment, and then began muttering to himself.

"Not there yet," he said. "Never mind, I will watch until I catch him, and then let him beware, for I will shoot him dead!"

He then turned, and, walking rapidly up the steps, disappeared within the house.

Not before Dodge had caught a glimpse of his face, though.

The man's appearance was startling, for, though his eyes were wide open, there was no expression in them.

He was walking and talking in his sleep!

The idea was hardly credible, but Dodge took up his position the next night, and saw the man come out, do and say the same things as upon the previous night, and then disappear again.

He stood right where the man could see him if he had been awake, but the somnambulist walked right by him without noticing him, and went into the house.

It was truly wonderful, but Dodge was determined to see the end of the matter.

He thought of a new plan that night, and when the next night came was ready to put it into execution.

At midnight the man appeared as before.

This time there was a light in the window opposite, and behind the raised sash sat a man, smoking.

At least it seemed to be a man.

It was not.

It was merely a dummy placed there by Dodge for a purpose.

The man came down the steps, and took up his usual position.

"Aha!" he muttered, "at last the time has come! Now, Carroll Banvard, know what it is to awaken the wrath of Halbert Carleton!"

The man advanced, raised his gun to his shoulder, and, taking careful aim at the figure in the window opposite, declined his head slightly and fired.

The figure at once fell over, and the man, lowering his weapon, said, in tones full of demoniac rage:

"Ha-ha! now it is accomplished!"

Then he ran swiftly up the steps, entered the house and disappeared from sight.

"Why didn't you arrest him?" asked Dodge's companion.

"Wait awhile."

The next night the figure was placed at the window again,

and Carleton appeared as before, took careful aim, fired, repeated the same words, and disappeared.

"He is the murderer," said Dodge.

"Without doubt; but one thing puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"Might he not have committed the murder in his sleep?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"For many reasons."

"Name some."

"When you first saw the man it was much earlier in the evening, and he could not have been asleep."

"Yes."

"The terrible deed has so worked upon his mind that he dreams of it, and every night takes up his position here, and enacts again the fearful tragedy of that night."

"You intend to arrest him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Very soon."

Early that same morning, for it was now past midnight, Dodge and a party of police broke into the house by the back way, climbing the fence, and using a "jimmy" upon the doors, and instantly began a search for the alleged murderer.

They soon came upon him in a large room, elegantly furnished, situated on the second floor.

"What means this intrusion?" he demanded, springing up, dressed only in his under-garments.

"Halbert Carleton, I arrest you for the wilful murder of Carroll Banvard!" said Dodge, drawing his revolver. "Surrender, or you are a dead man!"

"Great Scott! how did you find it out?" he gasped, catching at the tall bed-posts for support.

"You acknowledge it, then?"

"Yes—yes! but how did you find it out? My heaven! the agony of these days. Every night, it seems to me, I have committed the murder over again."

"We saw and heard you two nights in succession. You must go with us quietly."

"No—no, I will never give myself up; never be hanged for a mere act of rightful vengeance. Sooner suffer a thousand deaths than that!"

He tried to escape from the room, but powerful as he was, and struggle fiercely as he did, the men overcame him, and soon, handcuffed and heavily manacled, he was led away to prison.

He confessed the whole thing, but swore that he should never be hanged, that he would take his own life first, or die a natural death before the day of execution.

It seemed that he had returned from Europe, unknown to any one but an old servant, and had lived in the house, hidden by day, and walking out, closely enveloped, every night.

He had thought many times how he could kill Carroll Banvard without being discovered, and at last remembered his air-gun, a weapon he had not used for years.

When the crime was committed he intended to return to Europe, but there was no steamer for some time, owing to some delay on the other side, and the trip was postponed several days.

Then his conscience began to reproach him, and every night he would arise, dress himself, and in a semi-unconscious state take his place at the foot of the steps, and watch for Carroll Banvard.

Even after he had again killed his victim, as he supposed, he continued his sleep-walking, and no one knows how often he would have continued to re-enact the tragedy if he had not been discovered.

He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged.

He protested that he would never die by the hangman's rope, and a strong watch was kept upon him.

He made many attempts upon his life, but was frustrated in all of them, and at last expiated his crime upon the gallows.

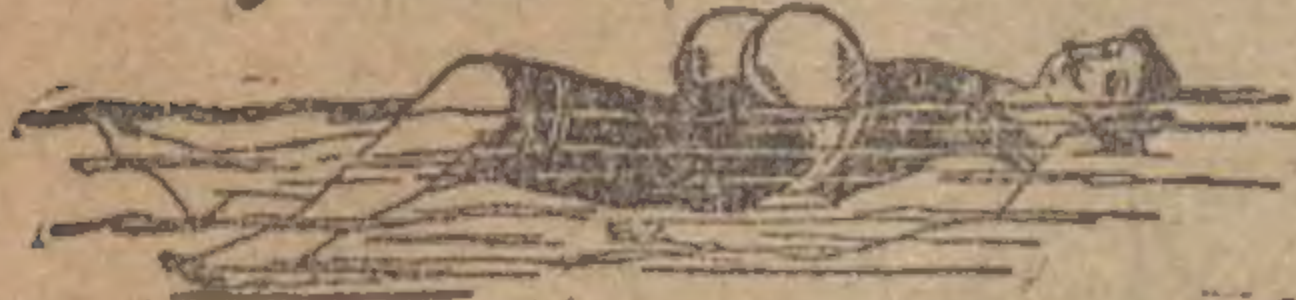
The German Government is rapidly progressing with the railroad that is to connect Darassalam with Tabora in German East Africa. A force of 10,000 laborers is at work on the new road, of which 374 miles have been constructed. According to the Deutsch Ostafrikanische Zeitung the ultimate extension of this road to Ujiji, on Lake Tanganyika, is practically assured. As the Belgians have now decided to extend their upper Congo railway system to the west shore of Tanganyika, the time is not far distant when it will be possible to travel by rail, lake and river across Africa from Darassalam to the mouth of the Congo.



TRICK COIN HOLDER.—The coin holder is attached to a ring made so as to fit anyone's finger. The holder clasps tightly a 25c. piece. When the ring is placed on the finger with the coin showing on the palm of the hand and offered in change it cannot be picked up. A nice way to tip people. Price by mail, postpaid, 10c. each.

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Ayvad's Water-Wings



Learn to swim by one trial

Price 25 cents, Postpaid

These water-wings take up no more room than a pocket-hankerchief. They weigh 3 ounces and support from 50 to 250 pounds. With a pair anyone can learn to swim or float. For use, you have only to wet them, blow them up, and press together the two ring-marks under the mouthpiece.

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THE MAGIC DAGGER.



A wonderful illusion. To all appearance it is an ordinary dagger which you can flourish around in your hand and suddenly state that you think you have lived long enough and had better commit suicide at the same time plunging the dagger up to the hilt into your breast or side, or you can pretend to stab a friend or acquaintance. Of course your friend or yourself are not injured in the least, but the deception is perfect and will startle all who see it.

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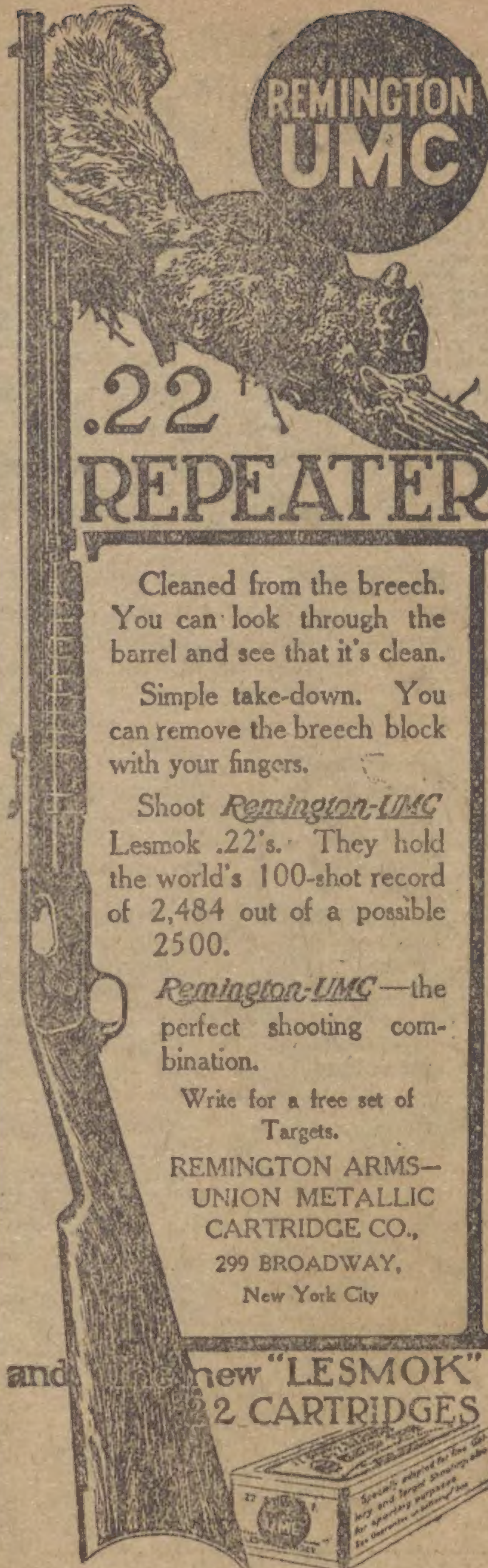


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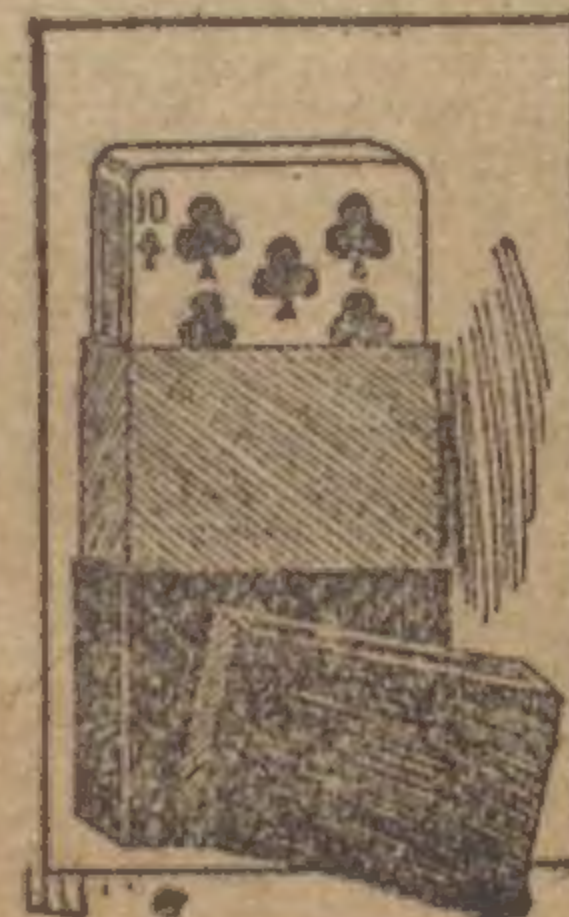
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and the new "LESMOK" .22 CARTRIDGES



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VANISHING PACK OF CARDS.—You exhibit a neat black card case, you request from the audience a ring, a watch, bracelet, or other jewelry articles. You propose to fill the case with a pack of cards. After doing so, the pack of cards disappear from the case, and the jewelry novelties appear instead.

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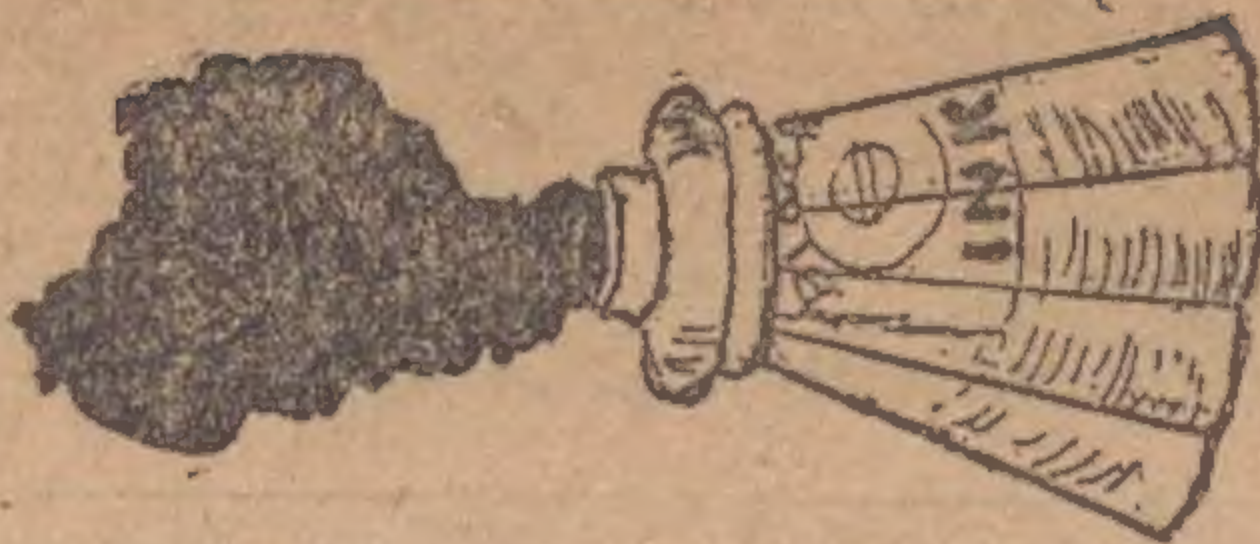
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311 W. 44th St., N. Y.



CACHOO OR SNEEZING POWDER.—The greatest fun-maker of them all. A small amount of this powder, when blown in a room, will cause everyone to sneeze without anyone knowing where it comes from. It is very light, will float in the air for some time, and penetrate every nook and corner of a room. It is perfectly harmless. Cachoo is put up in bottles, and one bottle contains enough to be used from 10 to 15 times.

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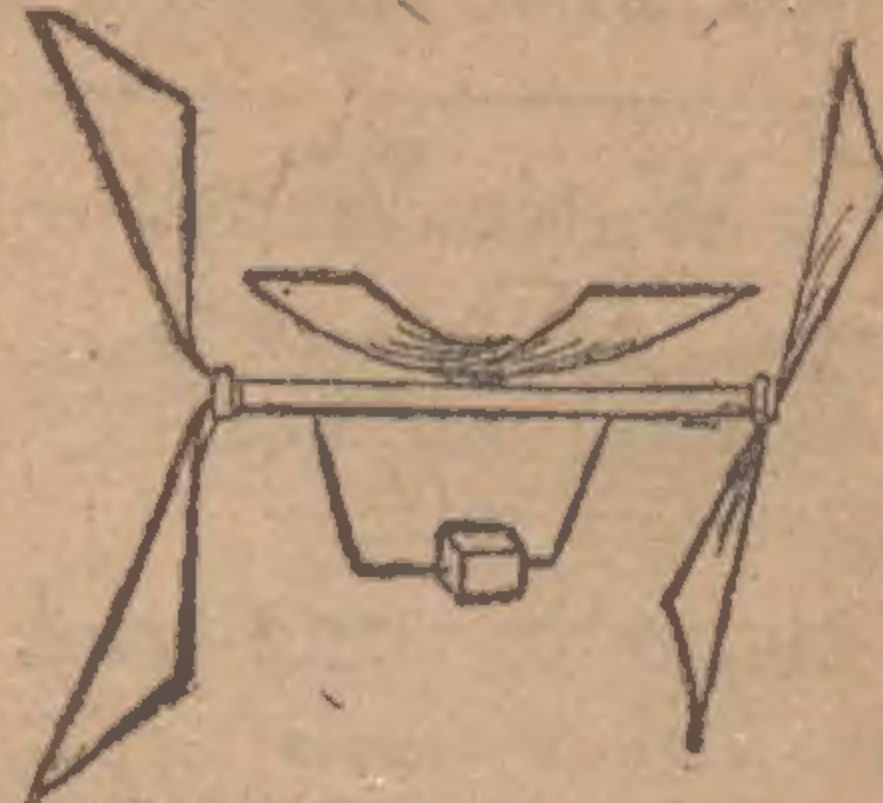
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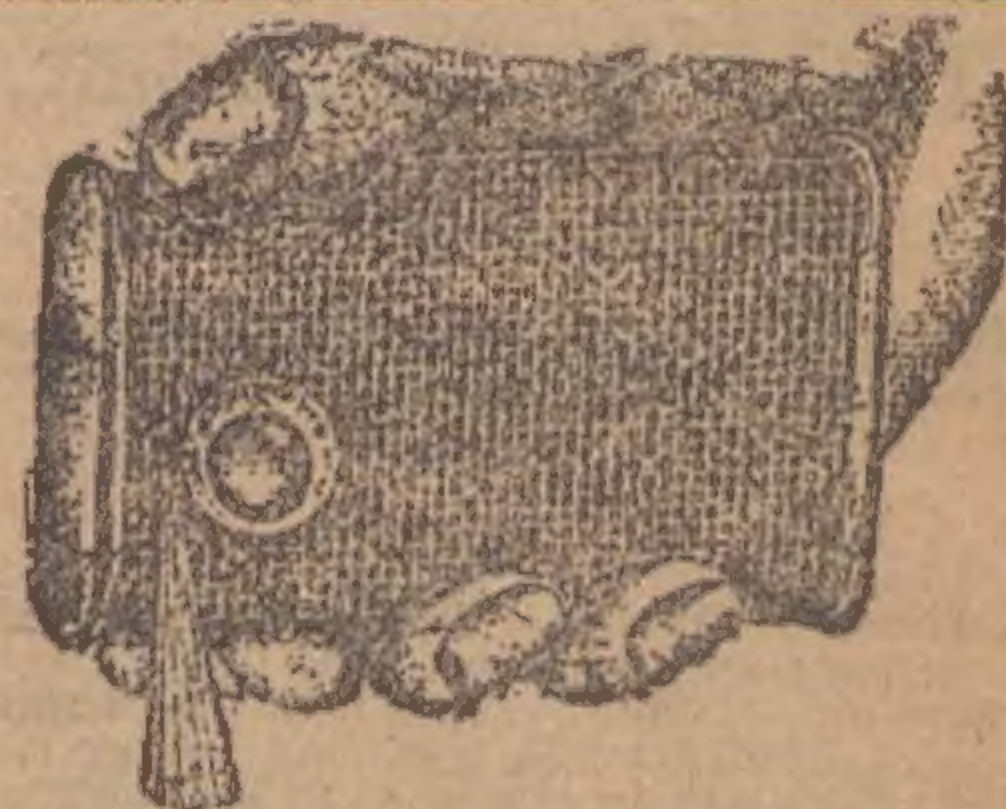
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